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THE TRAGIC VISION OF HERMAN MELVILLE  
A QUEST FOR IMMORTALITY

By

Lynne Stout Blumberg

B. A. Augustana College, 1946


Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

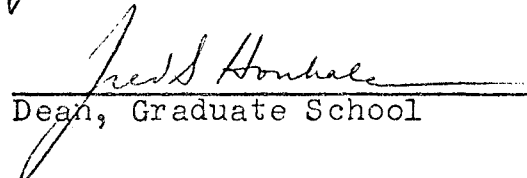
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1968

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## PREFACE

Herman Melville was a tormented, driven man; he was also a man who achieved literary immortality through his endurance and his efforts to scale the walls of his torment. The strain of Puritan Calvinism Melville inherited from his ancestors was particularly virulent in him. "Evil and good they braided play/ Into one cord," Melville discovered, and the umbilical cord of Calvinism was wrapped so tight about his neck that he nearly strangled before he developed strength to loosen it and gain air. It was from his efforts to come to terms with this burden and gift of the past--"the proven half of time"--that Melville developed a profound tragic vision: a vision which many men turn away from but few have the courage to explore, to understand and endure as did he.

Since the Calvinist indoctrination of his youth, the fate of his father and brother, and his obsession about immortality provide the foundation of his total anguish and grow into and out of each other, it is these three aspects of his life that form a part of this study. Neither Allan Melvill nor Gansevoort, father and brother of Herman, had the fortitude to face life when the real world encroached upon their illusory imaginings. From ages twelve through twenty-five, Melville, too, with the protective

insulation of youth, lived shallowly in youthful optimism like a "god sublime." This optimistic, essentially opportunistic phase of his life slowed to a halt during the winter of 1848-49. From this time, Melville declared he dated his life, and he asserted that before that he had had "no development at all."

Yet he certainly had the basis for the later development that took place. It was in the first twelve years of Melville's life that he gained a knowledge of the conflicts of theological and worldly reality, the appearances that passed as reality, and a death that was approached not in peace but in terror. It was in the years immediately following his father's death that Melville changed from the quiet, thoughtful and conscientious child he had been to an opportunistic youth of facile principles. This paper does not concern itself with that phase of his life nor has any work on Melville that this writer has seen tried to reconcile, or even call attention to, the disparity between Melville's earlier and later character with this unprincipled, opportunistic and romantic gesturing of his belated and extended adolescence. It is certainly the only period in Melville's life in which he imitates his father and brother's essentially juvenile response to life. Herman Melville was a long time growing from adolescent boy to mature man, yet he did make that growth. His father and

brother didn't--and couldn't. Allan Melvill and Gansevoort were more products of their age; Herman Melville was more a product of his past. Except for that self-assessed dormant period of his life, Melville basically confirmed the attitudes in behavior of a Puritan. His familiarity with and reliance on the Bible, his glory in hard work, his overly active conscience, his sense of guilt, his concern for his fellow man, his tendency to introspection, and his need for continual and exhaustive self-analysis were reminiscent of the Puritan. And like a Puritan minister, Melville searched out every premise of theological debate to find the loophole or discover the hidden course to faith.

Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote late in his life that Melville never could believe nor disbelieve and that he was too honest and courageous to do one or the other. For a Puritan Calvinist, immortality was granted to those who had saving grace that came from faith in Jesus Christ. Yet no man could instigate that faith; faith had to be given him by the grace of God. From the beginning the question of whether he actually had God-given, therefore saving, grace was the Puritan anguish. Through the years, this concern became diluted sufficiently that the soul-searching Puritan gave way to the utilitarian American who assumed that since he went to church he must have faith.

Melville, born at the beginning of this easier age was, however, reared in the Dutch Reform Church, which was as unliberal as the Puritan churches of early America. Any introspective person brought up in an environment of Calvinism who apparently cannot achieve any access to faith is most apt to reject Calvinism. But when that person is a deep thinker and he sincerely believes that "no deeply-thinking man" can ever "weigh this world" without recognizing the validity of that "Calvinistic sense of innate Depravity and Original Sin," then he cannot dispense with that which discomforts him without being made intolerably uncomfortable. He finds it difficult to believe that which makes life easy for him and to disbelieve that which makes life difficult.

Melville's vision of life became profoundly tragic, and this vision grew in part out of a revulsion that any man should be damned. His "ruthless democracy," as he assessed it, was undoubtedly a subconscious reaction to his aversion to the doctrine of an elect. Yet he could not keep from hoping that there was a justice and a purpose in life that he, as mortal man, had not yet understood which would give meaning to the apparent meaninglessness of life. Yet without that proof or assurance, Melville never sacrificed his courage or his honesty to grasp easy answers.



Ideological solutions that satisfied his optimistic brethern could not content him for he knew these answers offered only partial truths. The truth Melville sought was absolute and whole.

The final section of this paper is an analysis of the two-volume poem Clarel, published in 1876 when Melville was fifty-seven years of age. The long poem provides a candid commentary on the religious, political, social and moral conditions of the mid- and late-19th century mentality. Clarel, also, is the account of a young man's growth into the tragic vision of life. Because Herman Melville had a profound tragic vision--a vision that accepts suffering as the inevitable condition of man--and because he endured and continued until death to seek meaning in that meaningless existence, he speaks much more familiarly to the 20th century than he did to his own age.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PORTENT WOUND

## AT MELVILLE'S TOMB

by Hart Crane

Often beneath the wave, wide from this ledge,  
The dice of drowned men's bones he saw bequeath  
An embassy. Their numbers, as he watched,  
Beat on the dusty shore and were obscured.

And wrecks passed without sound of bells,  
The calyx of death's bounty giving back  
A scattered chapter, livid hieroglyph,  
The portent wound in corridors of shells.

Then in the circuit calm of one vast coil,  
Its lashings charmed and malice reconciled,  
Frosted eyes there were that lifted altars:  
And silent answers crept across the stars.

Compass, quadrant and sextant contrive  
No farther tides. . . . High in the azure steeps  
Monody shall not wake the mariner.  
This fabulous shadow only the sea keeps.

## THE PORTENT WOUND

It was not many years after Herman Melville's birth in 1819 that his father assessed his son as a "rugged" lad--if somewhat slow in understanding.<sup>1</sup> Although Allan Melvill (the final e was added later to the family name) has been accused of short-sightedness in not recognizing his second son as the genius he later proved to be--and blamed for favoring his oldest son Gansevoort with a more complimentary vision--he did have the insight to discern early the quality of ruggedness in Melville's constitution and character. Quite likely, it was this quality, lacking in the father as well as his oldest son, which enabled Herman to withstand better the misfortunes which plagued them all.

The lives of Allan, Gansevoort and Herman Melville were all "tragic" yet only Herman was sufficiently "rugged" to endure living with tragedy as an essential part of reality. As the Christian theologian, E. J. Tinsley, has noted, the use of tragic in daily conversation and the more formal, literary definition of tragedy stem from the same base: they both are used to express--one unsophisticatedly, the other dramatically--"the feelings and perplexities

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<sup>1</sup>Jay Leyda, The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville 1819-1891 (2 vols.; New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), pp. 9, 25.

raised by the contrast between human love and reason and the seemingly hostile and irrational environment of man."<sup>2</sup>

In Allan Melvill's assessment of the times and events in letters to his friends and relatives in the years preceding his death, he reveals a temperament which could neither tolerate belief in the hostility or irrationality of an environment nor withstand the effects of personal misfortune and unalleviated sorrow. The letters also disclose a man so protective as a parent and so doting in his concern that he rivals Timothy Edwards and Jonathan Edwards in this respect.<sup>3</sup> As Melvill attested repeatedly, his greatest concern was not for worldly riches but to provide for the "rational" wants of his family. To this end, he wrote his father a month after Herman's birth:

I am neither emulous of riches or distinction, they are both insufficient to ensure happiness, or purchase health, a man may do very well in private life with a mere competency, & if I can only provide for the rational wants of my beloved Wife & Children, I shall be content with my lot, & bless the hand from which all favours come.<sup>4</sup>

But a compression of excerpts from Melvill's letters

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<sup>2</sup>E. J. Tinsley, Christian Theology and the Frontiers of Tragedy (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1963), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Although Calvinist ministers who believed in predestination, the Edwardses as parents sufficiently accepted a personal responsibility for the health and well-being of their children that in their absence from home their letters were filled with the type of cautions Melvill was apt to punctuate his letters with: "Let him Herman avoid green Fruit & unseasonable exposure to the Sun & heat."

<sup>4</sup>Leyda, Log, p. 5.

written between 1819 and the year of his death indicates the nature of those "favours" and the nature of Allan Melvill's tragic end. During the years 1819-1826, in Melvill's letters to his father Major Thomas Melvill, his friend Lemuel Shaw, and his brother-in-law Peter Gansevoort (hereafter referred to as Peter to avoid confusion with Melvill's son Gansevoort), he optimistically offsets each report of slow and unprofitable business with bright hopes for increased business forthcoming in the future. His confidence in himself (with his self-confessed virtues of "confirmed habits of industry prudence & perseverance"); his trust in the "favour of Providence," and his fair partner's encouragement, allowed Melvill to weather the crisis of a general depression in 1820.

In fact my prospects brighten, & without being over sanguine, I may be allowed to indulge, under the blessing of Heaven, anticipations of eventual success, my little Barque having weathered the storm which has wrecked the fortunes of thousands, & scattered ruin around her in all directions, now rides in comparative security, & will I trust with prudence at the helm ever avoid the shoals & breakers which may obstruct her passage.<sup>5</sup>

What he does not mention is that his wife received a loan of \$2,000 from her mother the month before he wrote the letter.<sup>6</sup> Frequently accompanying his letters of eventual good cheer, though, are requests for new loans or

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

renewals of notes. In December, 1823, Peter and Melvill had an "unpleasant exchange of letters" over Melvill's debts.<sup>7</sup> The exchange must not have been sufficiently "unpleasant" to discourage Melvill from requesting a large loan, to be obtained for him by Peter, in December, 1826. That Peter was anxious about Melvill's new "confidential Connexion" which required a large outlay of money (undoubtedly because he knew he would be the one expected to obtain it), was evident from Melvill's re-assuring letter to him in February, 1827, about "the new project, to which you so anxiously allude."<sup>8</sup>

In this same letter Melvill acknowledged that he had already pledged himself to an advance of \$10,000. "Therefore," he solicits his brother-in-law, "as you value my present welfare & future existence, disappoint me not I beseech you, in an emergency fraught with all that is personally dear to me in life, & which ever involves the present & ultimate happiness of my Family."<sup>9</sup> Melvill assures his brother-in-law that he has no where else to turn and that if he fails him, then "all, all may be lost to me forever."<sup>10</sup> Peter answers this appeal with two notes--for a

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.



total of \$5,250--which Melvill receives with "unutterable satisfaction" on March 2. Later that same month, though, he entreats Peter for an additional note of \$5,000, this time using stronger emotional appeals: "As you esteem me, & love our dear Maria . . . do not . . . disappoint me, in the utmost need . . . or all will be lost even to my honour."<sup>11</sup> As an additional inducement Melvill writes: "I hereby pledge myself never to request your responsibility for an additional sum."<sup>12</sup> (This was a pledge Melvill did not keep.)

The sums of money which Melvill obtained from Peter allowed him not only to salvage his honor but afforded him a sufficiently "liberal compensation" for him to provide his family with a house located on the "Fashionable side" of Great Jones Street and to provide modest luxuries such as dancing school for his children for two years.<sup>13</sup>

Before this event did take place, though, Melvill had to undergo considerable mental anguish. It is important to consider carefully Melvill's description to Peter of his mental state during the time he was uncertain whether his brother-in-law would indeed respond to his appeal.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., passim 32-39.

So vital to my hopes was the favour you have most promptly granted at an eventual crisis, that in spite of a fortitude of soul, firmness of purpose & energy & action, which having surmounted all obstacles, and sustained every shock with ceaseless perseverance, will I trust with Heavens blessing eventually meet a triumphant reward, my nerves were at the instant unstrung, while my heart involuntarily poured forth its ascriptions of praise to the divine Parent of all good, & my eyes betrayed the deep feeling that agitated both mind & body, & even now affects my whole frame.<sup>14</sup> (My emphasis.)

The description of this reaction is important because it reveals what must have happened to Melvill in January of 1832 when he had to admit to himself he was finished financially. This time, though, he--with good cause--knew that Providence in the guise of family and friends could not aid him. Without endangering their own financial stability, they did not have the resources to forestall his eventual bankruptcy. After the two years of prosperity, Melvill's financial difficulty of 1827-28 had renewed itself by 1830. In July of that year Melvill had to borrow \$3,500 from his father. In a letter of 1834 to Maria Melvill, Lemuel Shaw reported to her (in his capacity as executor of Thomas Melvill's will) that in 1830 Melvill's financial matters were so bad that he borrowed \$3,500 from his father to pay off certain debts--debts which if left unpaid would affect his honor.<sup>15</sup> He hoped to have this loan eventually deducted from the share he would receive of his father's estate, but

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

at the time of his death he was in debt to his father for more than twenty-two thousand dollars.<sup>16</sup> Shaw in his letter to Melvill's widow assured her that her husband "probably had no conception, that the amount would eventually be so large, or that he should become unable to re-imburse it in his lifetime."<sup>17</sup>

It is more than likely, however, that by January, 1832, Melvill did have this conception. He had had to borrow money again from his father in November and in December of 1830. His letter of December 4 reveals his state of near penury:

My situation has become almost intolerable for the want of \$500 to discharge some urgent debts, and provide necessaries for my Family, I can say nothing in addition to my Letter of the 3 Nov<sup>br</sup>, except that the daily expenses of my Family have been supplied by occasional loans from Peter, which I cannot think of increasing, & that I may soon be prosecuted for my last quarters Rent, & other demands which were unavoidably left unpaid at New York, while I am destitute of resources & without a shilling--without immediate assistance I know not what will become of me, but \$500 would save me from a world of trouble, & enable me to look forward with renewed hopes, in expectation of being afterwards able to support myself--which repeated losses & disappointments have prevented me from doing.<sup>18</sup>

Melvill had to continue to rely on his father for financial assistance during 1831 while he worked fruitlessly

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<sup>16</sup>William H. Gilman, Melville's Early Life and REDBURN (New York: New York University Press, 1951), p. 61.

<sup>17</sup>Leyda, Log, p. 44.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

to build his fur company into a business whose returns would allow him reprieve from debts. (Peter later attributed his working "so closely and assiduously as to produce a state of excitement" as the cause of his breakdown in January, 1832.)<sup>19</sup> By October, 1831, Melvill's financial affairs were in such a hopeless state that he had to borrow \$2,000 from Peter to make a payment on what he owed his father.<sup>20</sup> It undoubtedly was becoming apparent to Melvill that in his attempts to secure financial security through loans from his relatives, he was beginning to inflict a hardship on them--greater than they could bear.

With no relief from financial burdens to renew his heretofore-almost-unassailable hope in the future, Melvill in the first week of January, 1832, became "overwhelmed with horror."<sup>21</sup> For nearly three weeks, he fluctuated from the state of one "deranged in mind" to that of one who--if he lived--"in all human probability . . . would live, a Maniac!"<sup>22</sup>

But Melvill did not live a maniac; he died January 28, 1832.

From his earlier confession to Peter about the state

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

of his mind and nerves at the peak of the former financial crisis (see p. 8), it is not surprising that his optimistic and essentially boyish temperament could not exist for long, as man alone, in a tragic state. His was the kind of vision, impervious to experience, which could direct him to write the following letter to his brother-in-law on March 10, 1827--less than a year after Peter's intervention had saved him an earlier financial catastrophe.

My humble yet ardent confidence, in the constant protection, & eventual bounty of our almighty Parent, has been strong & unwavering, this alone could have sustained me in a fearful & protracted struggle which would otherwise have overwhelmed the boldest spirit & the stoutest heart, & will I trust still enable me to meet every future emergency with composure & fortitude--I too well know that for years to come, should my life be spared, I may look forward to the periodical recurrence of doubts, perplexities & apprehensions, but with the blessing of Heaven, I will yet surmount them all, & perhaps enjoy in the decline of life with my beloved Family, whose welfare is dearer than my own, the reward of honest perseverance, honorable intentions & undoubting Faith.<sup>23</sup>

Melvill's undeniably genuine concern for the health and well-being of his family was of a laudable nature, and his conscientious efforts to earn a liberal-enough income to provide them with the refining luxuries of life was an understandable goal. Yet it was in light of his exuberant expectations (trusting "with Heavens blessing [to] eventually meet a triumphant reward"<sup>24</sup>) that his actual attainments

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 33-34.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 31. In the context of Melvill's letter it is apparent he refers here to earthly reward.

so violently clashed. Rather than securing for his family the luxuries he sought for them, his buoyant optimism but provided them with poverty and debts. To accept the consequence of such an eventuality actually happening to him would have required a vision of life that Allan Melvill did not have. He had to believe that his "industry, prudence & perseverance" and his unlagging "praise to the divine Parent of all good" would secure the "blessings of Providence"--both temporally and eternally. His constitution was not sufficiently rugged to allow him to live, in sanity, in a world which was hostile to his hopes; his constitution was inadequate for living with a tragic vision of life.

Nor, would it appear, was his eldest son Gansevoort Melville's constitution any better endowed. The fate, in miniature, which befell his father, also struck him down--but not with immediate fatal consequence. Gansevoort's failure in the fur business (he took over in his father's place two months after his death) was more understandable; he was but sixteen when he assumed managerial responsibility. Again--as always--Peter carried the major financial load. When Maria Melvill certified that she would be held responsible for all debts incurred by Gansevoort in connection with the fur company, the note was endorsed by Peter.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 53. Naturally, Peter Gansevoort's name was the only one of consequence for he was the only one with money. Considering the abuse Peter took from his sister Maria--who took it as a personal insult whenever her brother

During the early months and years of Gansevoort's managing the fur business, he had to appear in court to testify on his mother's behalf in regard to suits brought against her for payment of promissory notes contracted by her husband<sup>26</sup> and to sue for unpaid notes.<sup>27</sup> With the legal assistance of Peter, they were able to forestall creditors sufficiently for Gansevoort by September to report--echoing his father's tendency to optimism--that in two years' time he would be making a net profit of \$10,000 a year in the fur business.

Less than two years later, however, Gansevoort wrote in his journal:

This m<sup>8</sup> had a note to take up of \$215.40/100 in favor of Gault Biglow & Co and \$375 borrowed money to pay Sheldon, Slingerland & Co.--and not a dollar to do it with; had not Uncle Peter raised Six hundred dollars for me from the bank, I could not have stood through the day.<sup>28</sup>

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didn't immediately provide her with the money she needed to maintain her family--he was extremely long-suffering and the real hero of the chaotic crises. An indication of the extent to which his assuming the burden of financing the Melvill family had weakened his own financial security is evident in a letter to his brother Herman: "I am pressed by the City Bank for the \$4000 & interest. . . . And Herman, knowing my situation in these respects, you not only stay away, but maintain a death-like silence." (See Leyda, Log, pp. 79-80.)

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>27</sup>Jay Leyda (ed.), "An Albany Journal by Gansevoort Melville," The Boston Public Library Quarterly, II (October, 1950), 343.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 344.

The journal Gansevoort kept from January 4 to March 24, 1834, has several references to fires in the city and on February 28, he noted "Had a false alarm of fire this eve'g."<sup>29</sup> Leyda, the editor of the journal, comments in an afterword,

Gansevoort's fear of fire was amply justified, for on May 6 of this year /1834/ his store, embodying all Melville hopes burned, at a loss (over and above the insurance) of no less than \$2000--a full-scale disaster in their financial state.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps not all of his hopes were destroyed, for Gansevoort continued with the business. But by 1836, even though Maria Melvill had received 15 lots through her mother's will and sold several of them at \$1,000 each, Gansevoort's business affairs were such that he had to make desperate appeals to his uncle for additional help. Disappointed in not receiving money he expected, Gansevoort informed Peter, "This necessitates me to ask you to do me another favor--Will you be good enough to see the Cashier tomorrow m<sup>g</sup> & obtain permission for me to overdraw to the amt of say sixteen hundred dollars."<sup>31</sup> Two months later Gansevoort needed \$2,000 more, and his itemizing of debts echoes his father's pathetic letter to his father (see p. 9): "The rent of the house is unpaid--The small bills which I

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 341.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>31</sup>Leyda, Log, pp. 66-67.



owe about the city are coming in for payment every day . . ."<sup>32</sup>

With reverses continuing, on April 15, 1837, Gansevoort had to declare a state of bankruptcy--a bankruptcy which Leon Howard, a Herman Melville biographer, attributed to "optimistic salesmanship which outran collections."<sup>33</sup> The last part of the month of his bankruptcy--with obligations of more than thirty-three thousand dollars compared to assets of seventeen thousand dollars<sup>34</sup>--Gansevoort's mother, with his brother Herman in attendance, had to sign a bond for \$50,000 to the New York State Bank.<sup>35</sup> The family was in such serious trouble that this time Peter could not salvage them their honor, although he did contribute their major means of livelihood for years to come. Although Howard speaks of Gansevoort's business shenanigans before his bankruptcy as those which got him into the "difficulties that eventually helped put him to bed,"<sup>36</sup> he wrote that after the event, Gansevoort was not "greatly stricken" and that he "bravely left home to seek his fortune in New York."<sup>37</sup> Although the latter comment was

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>33</sup>Leon Howard, Herman Melville, A Biography (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951), p. 10.

<sup>34</sup>Gilman, Melville's Early Life, p. 83.

<sup>35</sup>Leyda, Log, p. 69.

<sup>36</sup>Howard, Herman Melville, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

undoubtedly written tongue in cheek,<sup>38</sup> the former just as undoubtedly was not. Yet if Gansevoort were indeed not "greatly stricken" over his failure it must have been because his optimism allowed him the hope that he could still straighten out affairs. The purpose of his leaving home to go to New York, according to Gilman, was to "collect what he could from debtors in order to repay his own creditors as far as possible"<sup>39</sup>--particularly those small Albany businessmen in whose hands the Melvilles' most immediate honor was held. Although Gansevoort achieved a small amount of success, he finally had to return home when his "efforts to provide for his family finally collapsed."<sup>40</sup> He had a nervous collapse and was evidently bed-ridden for fifteen months. In a journal entry for late May, 1839, Allan Melville, Jr., younger brother of Gansevoort and Herman, wrote

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<sup>38</sup>Leon Howard is obviously not one of Gansevoort's admirers. When the opportunity presents itself, Howard frequently uses pejorative expressions in reference to Gansevoort's activities. When Gansevoort was still recovering from his extended illness, Howard described him as the "unemployed and still-languishing Gansevoort" (p. 28). In the Historical Note he wrote for the Northwestern-Newberry edition of *Typee*, Howard mentioned that the dedication in the American edition to Lemuel Shaw read "gratefully inscribed" but in the English edition it was "affectionately inscribed." The change, Howard said, "is the sort of change Gansevoort might make. . . . Gansevoort was before all--in his own mind, if not in reality--a rising young diplomat who would have considered it politic in England to place his brother in an affectionate rather than a grateful relationship with the Chief Justice of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts" (p. 284).

<sup>39</sup>Gilman, *Melville's Early Life*, p. 84.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 98.

that Gansevoort had accompanied him to New York that month, and he mentioned that this was the first time that Gansevoort had been in the city in fifteen months. "He had lain on his back at Lansingburgh during all this time sick," he wrote.<sup>41</sup> Also in May, Maria Melvill communicated the information to Peter that "Gansevoort feels well enough to go about, & will leave for New York in a few days."<sup>42</sup>

By compressing the details of Gansevoort's life to direct attention primarily to the similarity of his temperament to that of his father, a distortion of the total picture of Gansevoort results. In spite of his taking over the business while so young and then suffering a nervous collapse which incapacitated him for nearly a year and a half, Gansevoort still had sufficient time and energy to build a reputation as an outstanding student and an excellent public speaker. It was not only at home that he was considered a genius. The Melvill parents are accused by biographers of favoring Gansevoort,<sup>43</sup> yet there appears every evidence that Gansevoort did earn and deserve the greater approbation he received in his youth. The deterrent to admission of this fact is that Gansevoort Melville, taken overall and viewed from a distance, is not a very likable chap. His own documents reveal him as an operator and an

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<sup>41</sup>Leyda, Log, p. 85.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>See Gilman, Melville's Early Life, passim; and Howard, Herman Melville, passim.

opportunist. From the advantage of hindsight, it is now easy to see the lustre within the roughness of the less polished Herman, but the family who lived with the two boys did not have this advantage. Although there is no indication of blame directed at the younger son Herman for being less brilliant and articulate than Gansevoort<sup>44</sup>--nor is there any suggestion of a disparity in the amount of love given to the two boys--Allan Melvill surely must have felt flattered by the similarity of Gansevoort's attitude toward life to his. They both shared an optimism which envisaged no conceivable barrier which would keep them from attainment of their life's goals.

Gansevoort--if just on the surface--was like his father in another way too. In his journals, there is evidence of the same preoccupation with the virtues of "industry prudence & perseverance." But with Gansevoort, this preoccupation seems not so much a desire for character reinforcement as for a coldly viewed utilitarian gain. "To make money," he wrote, "it only requires a cool dispassionate disposition joined with talents even below mediocrity, and a determination to sacrifice every inclination and feeling that may come in contact with it."<sup>45</sup> Yet he, like his father, enjoyed setting himself precepts to live by. From the

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<sup>44</sup>Gilman, Melville's Early Life, p. 21.

<sup>45</sup>Leyda, Albany Journal, p. 331.

reading of "Watts on the Improvement of the Mind," Gansevoort worked out this theory in his journal entry for March 2, 1834:

Very few men endeavor determinedly to treasure up useful knowledge; fewer still to rightly inform and strengthen their judgment; still fewer to cultivate & improve their understanding, and to bring it as near perfection as may be, and how very few men are good logical reasoners?--Application persevered if in will /sic/ do all this, and it is in every person's power with great application to attain all these ends--and let us for /a/ moment consider the advantages which a highly cultivated understanding, the possession of extensive stores of useful knowledge an unerring judgment, and the power of clear, strong & conclusive reasoning will give a man; it will raise him above his fellows, it will make him their leader, in a word it will give him power--and with some minds the possession of power is in fact the possession of happiness.<sup>46</sup>

Gansevoort leaves little room for doubt but that his is one of those minds. During the months that he was an invalid in his mother's home in Lansingburgh he undoubtedly had time to store up many such precepts in his mind. When he finally was able to leave his sick bed, he entered the law office of a friend in New York but he soon became involved in activities outside the law office which could more rapidly advance him to a position of power. In a short time, Gansevoort sought and gained Lemuel Shaw, his father's friend, as a benefactor; he became actively engaged in the repeal of the Act of Union between Great Britain

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 343.

and Ireland, making several Repeal speeches in New York and New Jersey; he moved into the inner circle of campaign speakers for Polk for President, and he eventually went to London as Secretary of the Legation in 1845 in a political-payback post.<sup>47</sup>

In London, in addition to his duties as secretary, Gansevoort acted as agent for Melville's first book, Typee, and he saw the book through the press--serving as proof-reader, editor and advisor on the manuscript.<sup>48</sup> He also had the time to incur the enmity, through political and personal antipathies, of the minister under whom he served, Louis McLane.<sup>49</sup> Although Gansevoort gives no indication of the minister's hostility towards him, the letters of McLane make such a hostility abundantly clear. Gansevoort's journal, in addition to reports of sights seen, persons called on, theatres attended, and comments made relevant to Legation affairs, began in the middle of March to record that he did not feel well. By the end of the month his entries indicated he was having eye trouble, which his dentist thought was attributable to bad teeth. Never in the entries did Gansevoort list any symptoms of illness except

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<sup>47</sup>Hershel Parker (ed.), Gansevoort Melville's 1846 London Journal (New York: The New York Public Library Publication, 1966), pp. 5-12, passim.

<sup>48</sup>Victor Hugo Paltsits, "Family Correspondence of Herman Melville," The New York Public Library Publication, XXXIII (July, 1929), 513-515.

<sup>49</sup>Parker, Gansevoort Melville's Journal, pp. 12-13.

head aches, feelings of dullness, a severe cold, and trouble with his eyes. His journal entries stopped April 4th, and on May 12th Gansevoort Melville was dead.

McLane's version of Gansevoort's illness varied from the journal reports markedly. Eight days before Gansevoort died, McLane wrote Secretary of State Buchanan,

For the last month he [Gansevoort] has been confined to his house, with what he represented to me as an affection of the eyes, and a consequent loss of sight! From his physician, however, I learn that his sight is not materially affected, & that his disorder is in some degree connected with the brain, and a state of nervous derangement, which if it should now come would not surprise me.<sup>50</sup>

Although when Gansevoort's death came, McLane wrote his family a letter of sympathy, his correspondence with Buchanan would indicate that the sympathy extended could only have been dictated by form; his true feeling was probably one of relief. Whatever the true cause of Gansevoort's death, it is obvious that he was under fire in the London Legation and that the minister insisted that either Gansevoort go or he would.<sup>51</sup> Parker believes that the diary "is the best evidence in Gansevoort's defense," in that the charges made by McLane against Gansevoort are not echoed by reports in Gansevoort's diary.

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

There are sturdily patriotic passages, hardly more aggressive than, say, some of Hawthorne's a decade later, in a peaceful time. There are many references to pleasant dinners and friendly chats with McLane--references in tones of respect and gratitude. There are pleasant social notes on Gansevoort's acquaintance with such English notables as Sir Robert Inglis and William Gladstone. One turns from McLane's frantic letters to Gansevoort's diary wondering just how many of McLane's accusations to believe.<sup>52</sup>

On the other hand, another question which might also be asked--without pertinence to the implications of the political disagreements involved--is how completely should one accept the assessments of a young man who--like his father--tended to view matters, when they affected his prospects, optimistically rather than realistically, and--unlike his father--opportunistically rather than ethically. In order to retain such an optimism, a degree of insensitivity is required--a protective blindness which hides that which threatens security. And it would be an incompatibility of definition to suggest that an opportunist would care what the evaluations of him were of those persons who were in his way, or for him to be concerned with how his behavior affected their lives. The rightness or wrongness of his political stand in England is unimportant here; it is his temperament and character which are being discussed. There is just too little, including McLane's report of Gansevoort

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 14.



rather freely using the President's name in circles where he should not,<sup>53</sup> which jars with the image of Gansevoort one receives by reading between the lines of his own documents. Yet even if McLane were unfair in his charges made against Gansevoort--that he was capable of a "rhetorical extravagance of speech & manner, and truthlessness the most extraordinary"--and even if he were selfishly motivated in warning that Gansevoort could bring trouble to President Polk and the United States, it is inconceivable that he would falsify the physician's report that Gansevoort's illness resulted from a disorder of the brain and a "state of nervous derangement."

Both Allan Melville and Gansevoort--before their final illnesses--had demonstrated in preview what their reaction would be when they had to face living with an unpleasant reality, one they could not evade by clinging to illusion. The final performance appears to be similar too.

As with his father, Gansevoort had a presentiment of death. Whereas Allan Melvill underlined in his Bible the words "the terrors of death are fallen upon me," Gansevoort wrote in his last letter home (to his brother Herman),

I think I am growing phlegmatic and cold. . . .  
A degree of insensibility has been long stealing  
over me, & now seems permanently established,  
which, to my understanding is more akin to death  
than life. Selfishly speaking I never valued  
life much--it were impossible to value it less

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

than I do now. The only personal desire I now have is to be out of debt.<sup>54</sup>

Yet he enclosed a speech from Act III of Measure for Measure, which he entitled "Death," that has as its last four lines:

The weariest and most loathed worldly life  
That age, ache, penury and imprisonment  
Can lay on nature, is a paradise  
To what we fear of death.<sup>55</sup>

Between his personal desire and the message of his personally chosen quotation lies a discrepancy. If penury was a paradise to what he feared of death then his greatest desire was not to be out of debt but not to die. But perhaps this was a fact which Gansevoort, unlike his brother Herman, could not face directly. His letter reflects the bleakness he felt in facing the facts that he did. Gansevoort's constitution--no more than his father's--was not one rugged enough to live with a tragic vision of life.

And then there was Herman. Herman, who at the age of seven--according to his father--was an "honest hearted double rooted Knickerbocker . . . backward in speech & slow in comprehension" but who already understood "men & things both solid & profound!"<sup>56</sup> As Herman Melville matured, his understanding grew in profundity. It grew in magnitude as

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<sup>54</sup>Leyda, Log, p. 209.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

he lived through the tragedy of his father's death, and then his brother Gansevoort's death; it grew as he lived through the death of affluence, the death of ambition, the death of respect for his work, the death of friendships, the death of sons; it grew as he lived searching for answers for death, and his understanding grew into a profound but tragic sense of life.

That his brother Gansevoort and his father lacked the tragic vision of life this paper has tried to indicate and will develop more fully as the contrast of Herman Melville's reaction is shown. A younger brother, Allan, also gave no indication of having such a vision. Why, then, did Melville react so differently to much the same external influence? And what was the nature of his particular tragic view of life? The answers to these, and other, questions will be worked out in the subsequent chapters.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HAMLET IN HIS HEART

## THE COMING STORM

by Herman Melville

All feeling hearts must feel for him  
Who felt this picture.\* Presage dim--  
Dim inklings from the shadowy sphere  
Fixed him and fascinated here.

A demon-cloud like the mountain one  
Burst on a spirit as mild  
As this urned lake, the home of shades.  
But Shakespeare's pensive child

Never the lines had lightly scanned,  
Steeped in fable, steeped in fate;  
The Hamlet in his heart was 'ware,  
Such hearts can antedate.

No utter surprise can come to him  
Who reaches Shakespeare's core;  
That which we seek and shun is there--  
Man's final lore.

\*The picture is of Lincoln's death bed.

## THE HAMLET IN HIS HEART

Herman Melville was born August 1st, 1819, in New York City, and eighteen days later he was baptized at home by the Reverend Mr. Mathews of the South Reformed Dutch Church.<sup>1</sup> Although evidence exists which shows that Melville was baptized a Calvinist in 1819, and journal entries and letters reveal that he was still attending a Dutch Reformed Church in his teens,<sup>2</sup> some Melville scholars believe that since there are no records to prove Melville's church attendance or membership then it cannot be assumed at all that he was reared a Calvinist. Because it is a premise of this paper that Calvinist doctrines were instrumental in determining Melville's tragic vision, it is important to probe with some persistency into the question of the religious affiliation of his parents and the environment they provided in the home.

In the 1820s and 1830s the Dutch Reformed churches were undergoing "a kind of general revival" and "Knickerbocker Calvinism" was a major force in shaping the "culture of Knickerbocker New York."<sup>3</sup> As will be shown, it was in

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<sup>1</sup>Leyda, Log, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Leyda, An Albany Journal, p. 337.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Thomas Ward, "Herman Melville: The Forms and Forces of Evil," Unpublished doctoral dissertation for the University of Notre Dame, 1959 (University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1965), p. 16.

this orthodox, conservative authoritarian church environment that Melville was reared. He also grew up in an authoritarian home. In spite of Gilman's repeated reference to the cheerful environment of the Melvill home, and his assessment that Melvill was a father who indulged his children and "didn't have the heart to coerce them into pursuits that had no appeal for them,"<sup>4</sup> neither Maria nor Allan can be considered permissive parents. Both were disciplinarians: ultimate authority rested with them, not with the children. That they also loved and took an interest in the welfare of these children does not conflict with this fact. To Puritans and their descendants, parenthood was a serious responsibility. Both parents considered it their duty to instill in their children moral and spiritual values--in addition to providing for their material welfare. One of these values was respect for parental authority.

When Allan Melvill in a letter to Peter quoted his six-year-old daughter upon the birth of his fifth child, "Miss Helen Maria says 'if Pa has many more children he will have to keep the rod in hand the whole time,'"<sup>5</sup> he gave evidence of the success with which he combined both authority and love. Helen Maria was not so intimidated by his

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<sup>4</sup>Gilman, Melville's Early Life, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup>Leyda, Log, p. 13.

authority that she was afraid to express an association which came to her mind: father/rod. Her absence of fear would indicate a certain fairness in his use of his office.

Other indications of his disciplinarianism reside in random comments throughout his letters: ". . . for I do not allow them [Herman, 7, and Gansevoort, 11] to run abroad, or play in the street"; ". . . [their] inclination must always yield to Duty"; ". . . they will consequently imbibe habits of Order & punctuality, which bear sweet blossoms in the dawn of life"; and a caution to Peter while the children were visiting him, "Uncle Peter . . . will I trust ever prove an invaluable useful Friend, when love transcends indulgence, & who will rather consider their future welfare, than present enjoyment."<sup>6</sup>

His wife's assessment of Allan Melvill's demeanor was that he was "grave and serious."<sup>7</sup> His assessment of her was typical of his vision: she was a jewel, and she had extraordinary powers of enchantment.<sup>8</sup> Modern critics see her somewhat differently: the literary psychoanalysts depict her as a cold, selfish hostile woman whose lack of maternal love crippled sexually her son Herman.<sup>9</sup> That she

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 1-50, passim.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>8</sup>Gilman, Melville's Early Life, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup>See Charles Kligerman, M.D., "The Psychology of Herman Melville," The Psychoanalytic Review, XL (April, 1953), 130; and Henry Murray, "Introduction" to Pierre (New York: Hendricks House, 1949), passim.



was such a woman is no more apparent from the evidence than that her son was sexually crippled. (See Chapter III, footnote 56, pp. 69-73.) Incontrovertibly, though, Maria Melvill was a woman who had eight children in a period of fifteen years. She, from her own apologetic confession and the sympathetic testimony of a relative, suffered from irritability and nervousness after the birth of each succeeding child<sup>10</sup>--not an altogether uncommon after-effect of continuous child-bearing. Since she was human, and not a mineral nor an enchantress as her husband thought, she undoubtedly yelled at her children and she undoubtedly punished them sometimes undeservedly. Yet most children from large families learn to neither expect--nor want--unmitigated justice from mothers; they know they would fare much worse in the long run and it would take too much time out of their active lives.

William Gilman draws a complimentary portrait, for the most part, of Maria Melvill. He states that her letters disprove that she was a cold unsympathetic woman, and that they actually reveal that she was quite a sensitive and sympathetic person. He describes her as "essentially a simple, domestic, and somewhat provincial woman in whom a Dutch prudence, bluntness, and reserve were softened by

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<sup>10</sup>Leyda, Log, p. 22.

strong feelings of Christian charity."<sup>11</sup> She could be severe, though, and as an indication of this severity, Gilman cites the time she left Catherine and Allan at home because they were "the most rebellious & ungovernable,"<sup>12</sup> when she took several of the other children on a summer vacation to her brother's. Yet what appears as a severe punishment probably resulted from the practical need to leave certain of the children home.<sup>13</sup> It is not unusual for parents to look for plausible excuses so that they can do what they have to do without admitting the real reason. While responding to the dictates of necessity, Maria could also work toward the improvement of her children's behavior. As part of her Calvinist philosophy, she would know that no one was exempt from that need to improve himself. Had Allan and Catherine been the least rebellious and most

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<sup>11</sup>Gilman, Melville's Early Life, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Leyda, Log, p. 38. Other parts of her letter to Peter show Maria's anger with her brother Herman for not taking her son Herman for the summer. Herman, therefore, had to go to Boston to stay with relatives (where Allan might have been able to go otherwise). Maria took Gansevoort, Helen Maria and Augusta, the three oldest children--all of whom could manage for themselves--and the baby Francis, who was still dependent on her. In order not to burden Peter with too many small children and in order to get a needed vacation for herself, she would most naturally have left the two at home that she did. Maria also mentions that Allan and Catherine would provide "their Papa company"--a company that he desired, for he declared that when his family was absent from home, he didn't live, he only vegetated.

governable, they would have been the logical ones--because of their ages--to be left at home.

Perhaps a better example of her severity--although here again the motive was certainly founded on necessity in Maria's mind--was her requirement that her eight children "sit on little stools around her bed, motionless, while she took her daily nap."<sup>14</sup> This method provided a means whereby she could relax her parental vigilance sufficiently so that she could get needed rest while simultaneously being assured of her children's whereabouts and safety. For several children to keep quiet and to neither incite one another to open laughter nor noisy quarreling for the period of an hour or two is an indication of their mother's success as a disciplinarian. It likewise indicates a high degree of self-discipline on the part of the children.

The respect for authority the Melvill children were taught at home was augmented by the teachings of the Dutch Reformed Church. It is difficult to understand how scholars can refute this influence. Jack Boies' comment is typical of those who would discount it.

Evidence that Melville believed in any particular God or in the Patriarch of Calvin's Institutes and Jonathan Edwards' works--is spare. Melville's own writing and family documents suggest that

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<sup>14</sup>Paul Metcalf, Genoa: A Telling of Wonders (Highlands, North Carolina: The Nantahala Foundation, 1965), p. 4. This family report is offered by the great-grandson of Herman Melville.

critics who insist on his connection with Calvinism frequently protest too much.<sup>15</sup>

William Gilman's interpretation stresses the Unitarian influence in the Melvill home.

We may be sure that what doctrinal notions he Melville acquired from pulpit and catechism were tempered in daily life by his parents' liberal faith. The religious atmosphere of his home had a foundation in the Bible, but it was never darkened by the gloomy theology of Calvin. . . . The God of the minister may have stood for Calvin's inexorable justice, but the God of his parents, with their Unitarian inclinations, was above all else merciful."<sup>16</sup>

Before answering the charge of Boies, it is necessary to question an assumption of Gilman's in regard to the Melvill's "Unitarian inclinations." Maria Gansevoort Melvill came from a long line of staunch and devout Calvinists. As Gilman mentions himself, Allan Melvill and Maria Gansevoort were married "in the First Reformed Dutch Church in Albany by the Reverend John Melanchthon Bradford, the pastor and a friend of the Gansevoort family."<sup>17</sup> (Gansevoort was baptized by Rev. Bradford in Albany and Bradford's son, Alex, was a childhood and adult friend of Gansevoort and Herman's.)<sup>18</sup> After the births of Helen Maria, Herman,

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<sup>15</sup>Jack Jay Boies, "Melville's Quarrel with Anglicanism," Emerson Society Quarterly, IV (1963), 75-79.

<sup>16</sup>Gilman, Melville's Early Life, pp. 26-27.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>18</sup>See Howard, Herman Melville, pp. 17, 39, 99; and Ward, "Herman Melville, The Forms and Forces," pp. 24-25.

Augusta, Allan, Catherine, Francis, and Tom, they all were baptized in the Calvinist faith.<sup>19</sup> The playmates and the social friends of the Melvill children and parents in New York City were from the ministerial families from the churches in which the children were baptized. When Allan, Jr., was away from home for the first time in 1838, Maria Melvill counselled him by letter,

. . . if you regularly attend the Sabbath School, & thereby obey your Mothers parting injunction, for be assured my beloved Boy the future usefulness of the Man depends much upon the foundation laid in boyhood. The instruction you receive in Sabbath School is very important.<sup>20</sup>

Church records indicate that Helen Maria and Augusta became church members of the Albany Dutch Reformed Church in July, 1837, and October, 1838.<sup>21</sup> In Redburn, the fictional account of Herman Melville's first sea voyage, Melville writes of the regularity with which Wellingborough Redburn, his fictional counterpart, attended Sunday School. Although Redburn cannot be considered as accurate autobiography, much of it is accurate biography of his family's affairs.<sup>22</sup> Maria Melvill, by examination and confession of faith, became a member of the Albany Dutch Reformed Church in

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<sup>19</sup>Leyda, Log, pp. 4, 9, 14, 21, 49. Frances and Thomas were baptized in Albany in 1831.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 70, 81.

<sup>22</sup>Herman Melville, Redburn (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), passim.

1832.<sup>23</sup> Allan Melvill was buried in the Dutch Church section of the cemetery.<sup>24</sup>

Documents exist which prove the validity of all the above facts. It would appear then that the Melvill parents hid "their Unitarian inclinations" fairly deep, for all their outward "affiliations" were Calvinistic.

As to the actual theological implications of Melvill's writings in his journals and his letters, a careful reading discloses that they indicate more of an absorption in Calvinist doctrines than they do of Unitarian beliefs. In a letter to his nephew Guert, Melvill writes "Let me conjure you, forget not your Creator in the dawn of youth . . . neglect not the Bible, regard it as your polar star, its religious precepts & moral doctrines are alike pure & sublime, & equally inculcate obedience, patriotism, fortitude, & temperance."<sup>25</sup> The Calvinists believed God's truth was revealed in Scripture; this was His "divine initiative." Only those who heard and studied the Word of God, the revelation of the Scriptures, could possibly gain salvation.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Leyda, Log, p. 53. Although the records do not exist which show Maria Melvill's membership in the Dutch Reformed Church of New York City, it can be assumed she did attend the Dutch Reformed Church and was undoubtedly a member there.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>26</sup>John H. Gerstner, Steps to Salvation: The Evangelistic Message of Jonathan Edwards (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), pp. 21-23.

During Melvill's youth--he was born in 1782--the liberal religious leaders still accepted that the Scripture "must harmonize with reason; it may be above reason, but it cannot be contrary to it."<sup>27</sup> A quarter century later the Unitarians began to approach the Bible more as an historical document subject to criticism and scientific inquiry.<sup>28</sup>

In a letter to a brother-in-law who had been at sea, Melvill informs him, "I watched your homeward course with the anxiety of a Brother, but never without the hope of a Christian, for although my confidence in your skill courage & perseverance was unbounded as the Ocean, I well knew that the utmost human efforts were unavailing, unless sustained by Him whom 'the winds & the Seas obey.'"<sup>29</sup> The belief that God intervened in men's lives to establish His sovereignty and to satisfy His justice is a Calvinist doctrine. That Melvill did believe that God so intervened is indicated in his letter to Peter, written in March, 1828.

May we unite with equal fervor in ascription of grateful praise, to that divine first cause, who always moulds events to subserve the purpose of mercy & wisdom, often subjects poor human

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<sup>27</sup>Conrad Wright, The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955), p. 194.

<sup>28</sup>William Rosenfeld, "The Divided Burden: Common Elements in the Search for a Religious Synthesis in the Works of Theodore Parker, Horace Bushnell, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville," Unpublished doctoral dissertation for the University of Minnesota, 1964) University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1965), passim.

<sup>29</sup>Leyda, Log, p. 24.

nature to the severest trials, that he may better display his sovereign power, & sometimes would even seem to interpose his immediate providence, while deducing as by a miracle good from evil, & converting an absolute into a positive blessing.<sup>30</sup>

Even as early as the 1760s the Arminians were disputing with the doctrine that God punished so that his sovereignty could be demonstrated.<sup>31</sup> Because the argument was so controversial and so difficult to prove from Scripture, liberal ministers of what would eventually be the Unitarian persuasion did not speak openly from the pulpit on this question until much later. That God's justice was not a vengeful punishment but an expression of his goodness was introduced slowly during the last years of the 18th century. Charles Chauncey, one of the leaders of the liberal movement, developed the thesis that God's aim was to have all sinners eventually reconciled with Him. This thesis resided in manuscript form for twenty years before Chauncey had the courage to have it published anonymously in England in 1784.<sup>32</sup> In the early years of the 19th century the Unitarian ministers in Boston openly proclaimed such beliefs from their pulpits, yet by 1828 Melvill was still voicing Calvinist doctrines.

Yet scholars still persist in labeling Allan Melvill

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<sup>30</sup>Gilman, Melville's Early Life, p. 23.

<sup>31</sup>Wright, The Beginnings of Unitarianism, p. 185.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 187.



a Unitarian. Gilman traces Melvill's Unitarianism to that of Thomas Melvill, Allan's father.

Major Thomas Melvill was a member of the Brattle Square Church in Boston, where he listened to the Unitarian eloquence of Buckminster and Edward Everett, and he read regularly The Christian Register, organ for the religious liberalism of Jared Sparks, William Ellery Channing, and Henry Ware.<sup>33</sup>

Newton Arvin also attributes Allan Melvill's Unitarianism to this source.

Thomas Melville, his [Herman's] grandfather, had succumbed to the liberalizing influences of late eighteenth-century Boston and turned Unitarian. It was in the spiritual domain of Buckminster and Channing that Allan Melville had been reared, and his own religious outlook, as a result, was a typically Unitarian fusion of reasonableness, optimism, "Arminianism," and trust in the rational beneficence of a paternal deity; a kind of pious Deism, in short.<sup>34</sup>

To the above array of facts, Gilman appends the information that "Allan Melvill seems to have shared the cheerfulness of his father's creed."<sup>35</sup>

How much cheer existed in the Unitarian Church before the middle of the 19th century is a matter of conjecture. The last half of the 18th century was spent by both orthodox and liberal theologians in "endless altercations,"

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<sup>33</sup>Gilman, Melville's Early Life, p. 22. Gilman assumes a more modern-day Unitarianism than actually existed. Unitarianism was Calvinism at that time, except for minor variations.

<sup>34</sup>Newton Arvin, Herman Melville (New York: The Viking Press, 1957), pp. 30-31.

<sup>35</sup>Gilman, Melville's Early Life, p. 22.

and a "spirit of dogmatism and bigotry" prevailed.<sup>36</sup> The only agreement of the warring forces came when they both resisted the influx of the "infidelity" of Deism. "This was one issue on which orthodox and liberals stood together, for to their dying day, they insisted that morality and religion had never been in graver danger than in the 1790's."<sup>37</sup>

Over and above all of this, of course, in reference to Allan Melvill's indoctrination into Unitarianism is the discrepancy of dates. The minister for the Brattle Street Church from Melvill's infancy until he was twenty years old was the orthodox Calvinist minister Peter Thacher.<sup>38</sup>

Thacher was one of the ministers who counteracted the whisperings and mutterings of universalism by publishing his treatise in 1783 which declared "That The Punishment of the Finally Impenitent Shall be Eternal."<sup>39</sup> Although only liberal ministers were considered as a replacement for Thacher when he died in 1802, the Brattle Street Church during the time Allan Melvill was growing up was headed by a Calvinist.

It would have been impossible, therefore, for Allan Melvill to have been reared in the "cheerful"

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<sup>36</sup>Wright, The Beginnings of Unitarianism, p. 232.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 245-246.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

surroundings provided by Channing and Everett's Unitarian liberalism. Melvill was married by 1814, the year Edward Everett became pastor of the Brattle Street Church.<sup>40</sup> Not until 1819 did William Ellery Channing become prominent in Unitarian activities, when he delivered the ordination sermon for Jared Sparks. At this time he charted the course for liberal Unitarianism. At the time that Thomas Melvill "had succumbed to the liberalizing influence" of Channing and Everett, Allan Melvill had succumbed to Maria Gansevoort's charms, and thereby remained in the folds of orthodox Calvinism.

As an evidence of the Allan Melvills' relaxed attitude toward religion, Gilman points out that Maria mentioned attending church but four times in her letters and Allan never mentioned going to church in all of his.<sup>41</sup> Yet for the Melvills to mention their going to church would have been as unnecessary as for them to mention their going to the green grocers. Church-going was a taken-for-granted event in religious families in the early 19th century. If the family didn't go to church, or if they went to a service at a different time or place, then they were more apt to

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<sup>40</sup>William R. Hutchison, The Transcendentalist Ministers: Church Reform in the New England Renaissance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 14.

<sup>41</sup>Gilman, Melville's Early Life, p. 21.

mention it.<sup>42</sup> It is inconceivable, also, that Dutch Reformed ministers would baptize children in their faith without the regular attendance of the parents in church. Baptism of children requires the profession of faith of the parents in churches of such strict doctrines as the Calvinist churches. It is also true that wherever they lived, the Melvills had as a social friend the minister of the Dutch Reformed Church who baptized each child. This would indicate, also the Melvills' close church connection.<sup>43</sup>

It was in this environment--not too separated from the environment of 18th century Puritan families--that Herman Melville grew up. On Sundays, he could learn to perfect the art his mother was directing him in: the art of quiet sitting. Herman (as well as his brothers and sisters) had to sit quietly, keep his eyes open, and give the appearance of one listening intently to the sermons of the minister; if he day-dreamed instead he would be but following a tradition established by generations of children before him. Yet it is unlikely that any child daydreamed all the while in church; to daydream was to risk falling asleep--and punishment.

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<sup>42</sup>See Leyda, An Albany Journal, passim; Leyda, Log, passim; and Raymond Weaver (ed.), Herman Melville's Journal Up The Straits (New York: The Colophon, 1935), passim.

<sup>43</sup>Ward, "Herman Melville: The Forms and Forces," pp. 24-25.

In his youth particularly Herman was not a rebel; he was "a good obedient Boy" most of the time.<sup>44</sup> As happens in large families where children are born close together and the demands on the mother's strength and time are great, a child comes along who fits right in without creating havoc ("the little Stranger . . . sleeps well & feeds kindly").<sup>45</sup> Such a child, because he makes so few demands and causes so little disturbance, can be almost overlooked. The adage that "it's the squeaky wheel that gets greased" is appropriate here. And while others are clamoring for attention, a child like Herman stands back and observes what goes on around him. He sees acts; he hears words; he stores them in his memory. When he sees more acts and hears more words he discovers that although they should be the same they are different from those words and acts he has stored in his memory. So he watches more closely and he listens more intently, during which time he makes a discovery: appearance and reality are different. But he doesn't know he has discovered it; all he comprehends is that it is harder for him to understand what is going on than it appears to be for the others in his family. Again he has no idea that his difficulty in understanding results from the greater depth and breadth

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<sup>44</sup>Leyda, Log, p. 39.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

of his vision.

At home, Herman could gain relief from his introspection by momentarily pestering Gansevoort,<sup>46</sup> for whom answers came easy, but at church he had no recourse but to listen to the words of the minister. He, as the other children of that day, was supposed to give an account of the sermon he heard, and he had to "master the questions in the Heidelberg Catechism."<sup>47</sup> In this catechism, he learned that

Man possesses a depraved nature and is so corrupt that "he is wholly incapable of doing any good and is inclined to all evil" . . . he learned also that God will punish all sins, both original and actual, "by a just judgment temporally and eternally" and that God is not only merciful but just, requiring "that sin which is committed against the most high majesty of God, be also punished . . . with everlasting punishment of body and soul."<sup>48</sup>

As a child, he undoubtedly learned and recited the answer the Calvinists have for the question, "Does not God, then, wrong man by requiring of him in his law that which he cannot perform," but as an adult it was this question for which he could never find an answer that satisfied him. Even Jonathan Edwards had difficulty accepting the tenet of God's absolute sovereignty in Calvinist doctrine.

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 20..

<sup>47</sup>Ward, "Herman Melville: The Forms and Forces," p. 28.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

From my childhood up, my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty, in choosing whom he would to eternal life, and rejecting whom he pleased; leaving them eternally to perish, and be everlastingly tormented in hell. It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me.<sup>49</sup>

Whether the ministers Herman Melville heard as a child (The Reverends Robert McLean and Jacob Brodhead in New York and John Ludlow and Thomas Vermilye in Albany)<sup>50</sup> dwelt overly long on the horrors of hell, they were certain to have warned of the danger of eternal damnation. Such sermons undoubtedly made little impression on Herman as a boy. (After his father's death they would be inclined to make more.) Miguel de Unamuno's description of his reactions to such sermons is nearly universal. He wrote, "In the days of the simple faith of my childhood, descriptions of the tortures of hell, however terrible, never made me tremble, for I always felt that nothingness was much more terrifying."<sup>51</sup>

Most sermons that children hear on the tortures of

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<sup>49</sup>Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections, with Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes, ed. Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson (New York: American Book Company, 1935), p. 58.

<sup>50</sup>Ward, "Herman Melville: The Forms and Forces," pp. 24-27, passim.

<sup>51</sup>Miguel de Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Peoples (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1926), p. 43. In the margin of the University library book a penciled notation beside this passage said, "So did I." Below this comment in a different handwriting were the words, "Me, too."

hell are soon forgotten if listened to in the first place. Young children are not apt to worry about where they're going so long as they go there with their parents, and older children have a belief in their own invulnerability. As Melville wrote in one of his poems appearing in Battle Pieces, "Youth feels immortal, like the gods sublime."<sup>52</sup>

It is when the buffers of childhood and inexperience go and the individual encounters the evil in the world and in himself that he may begin to ponder over the earlier admonitions. After the death of his father, Herman would naturally have had cause to be concerned about what happened to a person after he died. He would have known, from talk at church and at home, that some persons were saved but most were damned--and those that most prospered in this world were the ones most likely to enter the "world of endless bliss beyond the grave."<sup>53</sup> Herman would have heard his father's rejoicing and prayer of thankfulness to the author of all good when one of his brothers or sisters recovered from a severe illness, and he would have noted the relief his father felt when he successfully weathered a financial storm. That his Uncle Peter or his Grandfather Melvill provided his father with the capital to stay solvent he may or may not have known, yet he was certain to

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<sup>52</sup>Herman Melville, Poems (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), p. 18.

<sup>53</sup>Gilman, Melville's Early Life, p. 23.



have known that his father considered anything good that happened to be God's doings. (Allan Melvill saw his relatives as "instruments" of God, when they saved him from financial catastrophe. He, himself, had considered himself an instrument in carrying out God's plans when he exerted his efforts to keep his father on in his post at the Boston Port: "I exult in the happy consciousness of having been instrumental under the peculiar direction of Providence, in 'dispelling the gloom that has too long hung over the habitation' of my Parents.")<sup>54</sup>

But when his father failed--and his failure was final--where was there any answer for that! No one, acting on God's behalf, had stepped in to save him. Could a devout Calvinist, noting the symbol of Allan Melvill's earthly failure, have hope for his eternal salvation? The reaction of the family to Allan Melvill's death was simply expressed by Herman's mother when she commented in the margin of her husband's Bible underlinings, "God moves in a misterious way."<sup>55</sup> Rather than rail at God, rather than act horrified by His ways, and rather than speculate on Melvill's eternal resting place, Maria--as a devout Calvinist--remembered the warnings of the Confessions of Faith:

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<sup>54</sup>Leyda, Log, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

And, as to what He does surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire into farther than our capacity will admit of, but with the greatest humility and reverence adore the righteous judgments of God, which are hid from us.<sup>56</sup>

Prompted by a desire to alleviate suffering and to achieve peace of mind, family mourners took refuge behind the edict and did not openly torment themselves with blasphemous questions.

As a child, Herman may not have done so either. As an adult, however, it was just such questions as these that he could not refrain from asking. Yet it was the unanswered, and perhaps unasked-at-the-time question that originally prompted him in his lifelong quest for genuine answers--the answers of Truth. There can be little doubt that this question started forming then. Experience was to accumulate and lie dormant in him for thirteen more years before conditions of growth stirred these seeds of experience and gave them fertile breeding ground.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>"The Confession of Faith," Article XIII, The Constitution of the Reform Dutch Church of North America, as quoted in "Ward, Herman Melville: The Forms and Forces of Evil," p. 29.

<sup>57</sup>In a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne written in June, 1851, Melville wrote "My development has been all within a few years past. I am like one of those seeds taken out of the Egyptian Pyramids, which, after being three thousand years a seed and nothing but a seed, being planted in English soil, it developed itself, grew into greenness, and then fell to mould. So I. Until I was twenty-five, I had no development at all. From my twenty-fifth year I date my life." Merrel R. Davis and William H. Gilman, The Letters of Herman Melville (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 130.

Herman Melville was one of those rare persons on whom experience had an effect.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE TRAGIC VISION

## CAIN

by Lord Byron

Adam. Son Cain, my first-born, wherefore are  
thou silent?

Cain. Why should I speak?

Adam. To pray.

Cain. Have ye not prayed?

Adam. We have, most fervently.

Cain. And loudly: I  
Have heard you.

Adam. So will God, I trust.

Abel. Amen!

Adam. But thou, my eldest-born, art silent still?

Cain. 'Tis better I should be so.

Adam. Wherefore so?

Cain. I have nought to ask.

Adam. Nor aught to thank for?

Cain. No

Adam. Dost thou not live?

Cain. Must I not die?

## THE TRAGIC VISION

Although Melville scholars agree that Herman Melville had a tragic vision of life, they do not agree as to what constituted that vision.<sup>1</sup> Sedgwick would even transfer Melville's tragedy from that of vision to mind.<sup>2</sup> Certain writers and theologians assert, also, that it is impossible to have a tragic vision and an acceptance of the Christian faith, since tragedy is un-Christian in its implications.<sup>3</sup> Others would insist that Melville was not a Christian but an agnostic, an

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<sup>1</sup>See Howard Vincent, The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1949); Nathan Scott (ed.), The Tragic Vision and the Christian Faith (New York: Association Press, 1957); Zygmunt Adamczewski, The Tragic Protest (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963); W. H. Auden, "The Christian Tragic Hero," New York Times Book Review, L (December 16, 1945); Murray Krieger, The Tragic Vision (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960); Henry Alonzo Myers, Tragedy: A View of Life (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1956); Richard B. Sewall, The Vision of Tragedy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959); Stanley Geist, Herman Melville: The Tragic Vision and the Heroic Ideal (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939).

<sup>2</sup>William Ellergy Sedgwick, Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1962).

<sup>3</sup>See Laurence Michel and Richard B. Sewall, Tragedy: Modern Essays in Criticism; Scott, The Tragic Vision and the Christian Faith.

atheist, a nihilist.<sup>4</sup> Tinsley perhaps best explains the situation which would allow Melville to be a Christian and to possess the tragic vision.

The tragic attitude is not so much an outright denial of faith (it rarely has that kind of certainty) as a sceptical questioning of facts with which faith has to reckon.<sup>5</sup>

Part of the tragic enigma is the conflict between faith and skepticism; it is as old as the anguished cry: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."<sup>6</sup> The argument advancing the incompatibility of Christian faith and tragedy, Tinsley reminds, is based on the assumption that universal atonement is Christian Orthodoxy.<sup>7</sup> As has been discussed in Chapter II (see pp. 36-39), the idea of universal atonement reflected but a segment of religious thought in Melville's day and had been in the earlier history of the United States a heresy. It was certainly not an acceptable belief to church members of Melville's Dutch Orthodox upbringing. "Insofar as Gnosticism, Manicheanism, Calvinism, Jansenism are religions, they do indeed provide a powerful

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<sup>4</sup>Jack Boies, "Herman Melville, Nihilist," Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1959 (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, Inc., 1965); Henry F. Pommer, "Melville as Critic of Christianity," Friends Intelligencer, CII (February 24, 1945), 12-123.

<sup>5</sup>Tinsley, Christian Theology, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>St. Mark, Chapter 9, verse 24, The Bible: Authorized Version (Oxford: The University Press, 1955), p. 48.

<sup>7</sup>Tinsley, Christian Theology, p. 19.

support for tragedy," Michel wrote in his treatise on "The Possibility of a Christian Tragedy."<sup>8</sup> He defined the tragic vision as the result of "profound ambiguity in the presence of evil; human life as a predicament; standing under judgment; assurances called into question."<sup>9</sup> And Tinsley in calling attention to the Orthodox Christian belief on heaven and hell wrote, "The after-life as presented in Christian tradition has not uniformly been of the kind to dissolve tragedy."<sup>10</sup> Conditioned in childhood to an acceptance of the Orthodox belief, Melville as he matured developed a tragic vision that grew out of a revulsion that any man should be damned. From his early indoctrination in the Calvinist Church, he learned that man did not have free will and that he could not choose to be saved. He could only seek salvation by studying God's Word as revealed in Scripture, but he had no certainty that he would be chosen for eternal life. All he could do was hope for God's mercy through His granting grace by the atonement of Jesus Christ --but he was taught that few would be saved and most would be damned. When Sedgwick declares Melville's "mind was forever tacking as if against a powerful headwind, now in the direction of religious feeling and now in that of

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<sup>8</sup>Michel and Sewall, Tragedy, p. 229.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>10</sup>Tinsley, Christian Theology, p. 19.



religious disbelief; and on either tack his mind was taut to a passion of sincerity,"<sup>11</sup> it is very probable that the headwind against which he was fighting was the Calvinist doctrine of God's right to damn. A basic philosophical position upheld throughout all of his fiction, poetry and personal writings is the belief, directly stated by Babbalanja, "But better we were all annihilated, than that one man should be damned" (Mardi, Vol. II, p. 33).

Unlike Jonathan Edwards, Melville was never overcome with a "sweetness" of recognition of the justice in God's Sovereignty; he could not surrender his doubts, his fears. W. H. Auden would advise that it is in the inability to surrender that Christian tragedy exists. "What a pity it was this way when it might have been otherwise" is the reaction provoked by the tragic hero's defeat, for Christian tragedy is "the tragedy of possibility"--not of necessity.<sup>12</sup> The "otherwise," Auden states, is the possibility of becoming a saint--"an individual who of his own free will surrenders his will to the will of God."<sup>13</sup> But the Christian tragic hero--such as Melville created in Ahab--cannot surrender his will, and even though he knows he is weak he believes that with his own efforts, he will

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<sup>11</sup>Sedgwick, Tragedy of Mind, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup>Auden, "The Christian Tragic Hero," p. 234.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 236.

"transcend that weakness and become strong."<sup>14</sup> In thus defying God, he commits the sin of Pride, which Auden equates to the Greek hubris.

It is doubtful that Melville would have accepted Auden's thesis that the Christian hero did not have to be a victim of fate, whereas the Greek hero had to be. If Melville could have believed such a statement, he would have saved himself a lifetime of anguish. But Melville's Ahab--a Christian hero according to Auden, even in the act of defying God--questions whether it is his will or God's will that he do so. "Is Ahab, Ahab?" he asks; "Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm?" Ahab reasons that since the sun does not move by itself it is likely that neither does his arm. "By heaven, man, we are turned round and round in this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike" (Moby-Dick, II, p. 330). Yet Ahab, like Melville, is not content to accept submissively the fact of evil; he is intent on striking beyond the mask of the visible world to discover its origins. Melville made him a common, but uncommon, man; he made him a noble, but ignoble, man; he made him a tragic hero. Yet Melville knew that "all men tragically great are made so through a certain morbidness . . . all mortal greatness is but disease" (Moby-Dick, p. 74).

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<sup>14</sup>Auden, "The Christian Tragic Hero," p. 235.

Unamuno, too, believed greatness is but a disease, the disease of man's consciousness. This disease, which constitutes for him the meaning of the tragic sense of life, results from the hunger for immortality. "This cult, not of death but of immortality [is called a] disease. . . . Perhaps it may be, like life itself to which it is thrall . . . but this disease is the fount of all vigorous health."<sup>15</sup> Unamuno asked, "Can we restrain that instinct which urges man to know, and above all to wish to know the things which conduce to life, to eternal life?"<sup>16</sup> He believed that men could not--unless they deceived themselves and deceived others to deceive themselves. These men, for Melville, were the "yes-gentry," those who would never make it through the Custom house to get into Eternity. "All men who say yes, lie,"<sup>17</sup> Melville wrote Hawthorne.

Adamczewski identifies the "dis-ease" of the tragic protestor as the ground of ill-being.

To necessitate rejection of necessity; to be not at home at home; to lose what has never been found; to hold wholly to what escapes; to question without accepting any answers--these are some paradoxical possibilities of ill-being.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life, p. 42.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>17</sup>Davis and Gilman, Letters, p. 125.

<sup>18</sup>Adamczewski, The Tragic Protest, pp. 265-266.

These paradoxical possibilities were the ambiguities of Pierre and the ground of the tragic vision of his creator, Herman Melville.

This vision, according to Richard Sewall, is an "attitude toward life with which some individuals seem to be endowed to high degree, others less, but which is latent in every man and may be evoked by experience."<sup>19</sup> Unamuno believes it may originate "in a chance illness" or it may be "constitutional."<sup>20</sup> Sewall suggests that the tragic vision is not for the faint-hearted; it is not for those who cannot live with "unsolved questions" or "unsolved doubts" [Allan Melvill and Gansevoort] nor for those "whose bent of mind would reduce the fact of evil into something else or resolve it into some larger whole"<sup>21</sup> [the Transcendentalists].<sup>22</sup> Passivists who do nothing--although they admit that there are unsolved questions and they

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<sup>19</sup>Sewall, The Vision of Tragedy, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup>Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup>Sewall, The Vision of Tragedy, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup>Melville was first attracted to Carlyle because Carlyle, too, had undergone great mental agony over his disbelief. But when Carlyle succumbed to Transcendentalism and had his hero Teufelsdröckh declare an "Everlasting Yea" and accept that "The Universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charnel-house with spectres; but godlike, and my Father's," Melville could not rejoice in Carlyle's disposing of evil so conveniently. The "Yea"-sayers, like Emerson, Carlyle, and Goethe, with their entreatment to suffering mankind to "live in the all, and then you will be happy" upset Melville. (See Davis and Gilman, Letters, p. 131: "My dear boy," Goethe says to him [a fellow with a raging toothache] "you are sorely afflicted with that tooth; but you must live in

accept that guilt, anxiety and pain are real--do not have the tragic vision for the genuine tragic vision is an instigator to action. It "impels the man of action to fight against his destiny, kick against the pricks, and state his case before God or his fellows."<sup>23</sup> The tragic hero is the person who is actively engaged in the fight; tragedy refers "to an object's literary form," and the tragic vision pertains "to a subject's psychology, his view and version of reality."<sup>24</sup> It was Melville's psychological need to probe to the center of reality which caused him to create characters who would delve into the unknowable. Through them, he could better make the deep descent into his own self which would enable him to come to a better knowledge of what it was to be. Unamuno believed that it was only by "penetrating deep into ourselves that we find our brothers," for "we can only know and feel humanity in the one human being we have at hand."<sup>25</sup> Through this penetration in depth, the deep diver seeks his origins which are common

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the all, and then you will be happy!") As an example of the similarity of Melville and Unamuno's thought, compare this statement made by Unamuno: "These clever-witted, affectively stupid persons are wont to say it is useless to seek to delve in the unknowable or to kick against the pricks. It is as if one should say to a man whose leg has had to be amputated that it does not help him at all to think about it" (The Tragic Sense of Life, pp. 16-17).

<sup>23</sup>Sewall, The Vision of Tragedy, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup>Krieger, The Tragic Vision, pp. 2-3.

<sup>25</sup>Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life, p. 39.

to all mankind. Melville reveals this fact in his literature and he alluded to this understanding in a personal letter to Hawthorne:

I talk all about myself, and this is selfishness and egotism. Granted. But how help it? I am writing to you. I know little about you, but something about myself. So I write about myself.<sup>26</sup>

On another occasion, he spoke about the "shock of recognition" which ran between all deep-thinking men.

One year before he had met Hawthorne, Melville wrote to his friend Duyckinck that he loved "all men who dive."<sup>27</sup> And Melville better than most understood what that deep diving entailed. It meant a closing out of enjoyment of superficial pleasures which ignored the tragedy underneath to an opening in of empathy for the suffering and pain in the world. Few people felt their souls within them, Melville said, but those who did risked madness. "And he who has never felt, momentarily, what madness is has but a mouthful of brains."<sup>28</sup> The dark truth of life uncovered by "the whole corps of thought-divers, that have been diving and coming up again with bloodshot eyes since the world began"<sup>29</sup> was the territory Melville's tragic vision

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<sup>26</sup>Davis and Gilman, Letters, p. 125.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

encompassed. "Any fish can swim near the surface," he said, "but it takes a great whale to go down stairs five miles or more."<sup>30</sup> Shakespeare was the supreme thought-diver, but in the beginning of his own search Melville wondered if even Shakespeare was "a frank man to the uttermost."<sup>31</sup> Melville realized it was near impossible to be totally frank and to tell the truth in "this intolerant Universe" but he declared early on that the "Declaration of Independence makes a difference."<sup>32</sup> Later, when experience had withered much of his enthusiastic hopes, he would have to curtail some of his exuberant expectations of democracy and admit that little could be learned that Shakespeare didn't know.

No utter surprise can come to him  
Who reaches Shakespeare's core;  
That which we seek and shun is there--  
Man's final lore.

When Melville wrote the above lines which were published in Battle Pieces and Aspects of the War in 1866, he had come close to reaching Shakespeare's core. Not all artists have to suffer personally the tragedies they depict in their art, yet to be great and lasting the artist must know human nature and understand what it is "to feel as wretches feel." He must, therefore, become acquainted with himself. Melville

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

would insist that to make this acquaintance, he must unpeel the layers protecting him from knowledge of himself. The descent into himself involves risks for the abyss of terror, insanity, is covered but by a glass veneer, and its aspect looks to be less frightening than that which is experienced as life lived in sanity.

Melville's descent into self for answers of what it was to be could have degenerated into a self-pitying and morbid passivity. As Henry Murray wrote in his introduction to Pierre:

Wearied and exasperated by the relentless underlying conflict and confounded by the constant inversions of value from positive to negative and negative to positive, the man may finally arrive at a state of virtual paralysis with no capacity for decision.<sup>33</sup>

Quoting Melville, Murray said that "an explorer 'entirely loses the directing compass of his mind; for arrived at the Pole, to whose barrenness only it points, there, the needle indifferently respects all points of the horizon alike.'"<sup>34</sup> This was true of Pierre but it was not true of Herman Melville. Melville's tragic vision of life would not allow him to give in to defeat. Once he had made the descent and had seen the abyss below and above him, "the perilous outpost of the sane" (Clarel, p. 352), he still had to persist.

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<sup>33</sup>Murray, "Introduction" to Pierre, p. xv.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. xv-xvi.



"Tragedy opens when the questioning grasps the parting and not what is parted, when it further under-takes the rift and not its bridging, when it sustains the BREACH in its very self," Adamczewski wrote of the tragic protestor. "And the deeper rooted is the questionable search, the more up-rooted the question-able searcher. The way down and the way up are one . . . there is joy in powerful striving / "yet, in bold quest thereof, better to sink in boundless deeps, than float on vulgar shoals; and give me, ye gods, an utter wreck, if wreck I do" (Mardi, II, 277)<sup>35</sup> and there is despair in elusive failure but they belong together."<sup>35</sup>

What Melville learned was sufficient to make him wonder that although the external world appeared to be formed with love the inner workings of this world were made with hate. Although he posited different conclusions in the minds of his fictional creations, he, himself, always hoped that he had not yet reached the core of truth which might reveal a grander purpose than that which seemed to be. Sedgwick refers to this insatiable hunger for truth in Melville as a product of his Calvinistic protestanism.

He cannot be satisfied with anything less than the absolute truth, to which, in the relationship of substance to form, stood absolute self-dependence of being--the same being the form of worship which his protestanism took.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Adamczewski, The Tragic Protest, p. 267.

<sup>36</sup>Sedgwick, Tragedy of Mind, pp. 162-163.

A mind insistent on seeking truth is often considered insane since so much of what a probing mind uncovers is diseased and abcessed. Rather than risk their own discomfort by considering the truth of the seeker's findings, many persons jar themselves less by calling him insane. Melville was so called. By the more conservative in name-calling, he was merely labelled a pessimist, a nihilist, a morbid man. It would have been impossible for Melville not to know this. The first attack on him started when he wrote Mardi, but since this book was his first offense in truth-hunting he got off relatively easy. "He Melville<sup>7</sup> has neither the mind nor the mental training requisite for fiction; and in aiming to become what he is not, he spoils what he is."<sup>37</sup> But even with Redburn and White-Jacket in between to soothe his indignant critics, Melville's second offense, Moby-Dick, could not so easily be forgiven. One of the first known reviews of The Whale (as Moby-Dick was known in England) was an indication of what was to come:

Our author must be henceforth numbered in the company of the incorrigibles who occasionally tantalize us with indications of genius, while they constantly summon us to endure monstrosities, carelessnesses, and other such harassing manifestations of bad taste as daring or disordered ingenuity can devise.<sup>38</sup> (My emphasis.)

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<sup>37</sup>Anonymous Reviewer, Spectator, XXII (April 21, 1849), 374.

<sup>38</sup>Anonymous Reviewer, The Athenaeum, October 25, 1851, p. 1113.

Because of his "morbid self-esteem," according to another reviewer, "Mr. Melville has survived his reputation. If he had been contented with writing one or two books, he might have been famous, but his vanity has destroyed all his chances of immortality, or even of a good name with his own generation."<sup>39</sup> Yet even though Moby-Dick was considered a failure, an occasional reviewer exercised a dash of Christian charity and only cautioned Melville:

O author of "Typee" and "Omoo," we admire so cordially the proven capacity of your pen, that we entreat you to doff the "non-natural sense" of your late lucubrations--to put off your worser self--and to do your better, real self that justice which its "potentiality" deserves.<sup>40</sup>

In writing Pierre, Melville thought he had written a book less likely to offend the public. In a letter to Sophia Hawthorne, he said that he would not again send her a book like Moby-Dick, that the next "I shall commend, will be a rural bowl of milk."<sup>41</sup> In his letters to his publisher, Bentley, he stated that his new book was "very much more calculated for popularity" than the books which Bentley had published of his previously.<sup>42</sup> Then when the

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<sup>39</sup>Anonymous Review, Democratic Review, XXX (January, 1852), 93.

<sup>40</sup>Anonymous Review, New Monthly Magazine, XCVIII (July, 1853), 308.

<sup>41</sup>Davis and Gilman, Letters, p. 146.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

book was published and the reviews came in, Melville learned how much closer to the truth he had come in Pierre than he realized. The book received hardly a favorable review and few sentences of appreciation. Many critics considered it as the ravings of a lunatic, yet their sensibilities were so shaken they took no pity on Melville but outright called him "insane." Even though the "aberrations of a mad man," these aberrations jarred Melville's readers. "The spirit pervading the whole book is intolerably unhealthy," wrote a reviewer in Graham's Magazine.

The author . . . has succeeded in producing nothing but a powerfully unpleasant caricature of morbid thought and passion. Pierre, we take it, is crazy, and the merit of the book is in clearly presenting the psychology of his madness; but the details of such a mental malady as that which afflicts Pierre are almost as disgusting as those of physical disease itself.<sup>43</sup>

"Morbid thought" sounded a discordant note in the age of optimism. And "morbid," according to Randall Stewart, is an adjective often used by "optimistic Americans," then and now, to express their reactions to "a great deal of truth-telling in literature."<sup>44</sup> To protect their "mindless complacency in the midst of an unperceived chaos,"<sup>45</sup> the

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<sup>43</sup>Anonymous Review, Graham's Magazine, XLI (October, 1852), 445.

<sup>44</sup>Randall Stewart, American Literature and Christian Doctrine (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), p. 74.

<sup>45</sup>Krieger, The Tragic Vision, p. 11. This phrase was used in a slightly different context but is applicable here.

mid-nineteenth century American didn't want to have the chaos described to him. It was more comfortable to declare that anyone who perceived such a chaos was insane.

Although Murray believes that Melville's reason was "losing ground" during the time he wrote Pierre, he--and authorities on the truly diseased mind--do not intimate that Melville was insane at any point in his life. And it must be remembered that clinical psychologists see obsessional and delusional aberrations in all of mankind, sane and insane. If Melville did struggle "against deterioration" through "projection" in his fiction, as Kligerman diagnosed, he also underwent after Pierre a "healing with defect."<sup>46</sup> Murray attributed Melville's frantic "voyages through the mind" as those of a religionist "fighting for spiritual survival."<sup>47</sup> "It is clear," Murray wrote, "that one of his intentions as author of Mardi, Moby-Dick, and Pierre was to give an account of this spiritual pilgrimage."<sup>48</sup> (Or, more likely, these three books were his spiritual pilgrimage. Clarel is his only work that could be classified as an accounting of this pilgrimage.) Unamuno would have said that his pilgrimage of anguish and his need to understand his (and man's) suffering was prompted by his longing for immortality. "Anguish is that which makes consciousness

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<sup>46</sup>Kligerman, "The Psychology of Herman Melville," p. 140.

<sup>47</sup>Murray, "Introduction," p. xxvii.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

return upon itself," Unamuno said. "For it is only anguish, it is only the passionate longing never to die, that makes a human spirit master of itself."<sup>49</sup> The longing for immortality, he believes, is the personal inward starting-point for all men's philosophies.

Underlying even the so-called problem of knowledge there is simply this human feeling, just as underlying the enquiry into the "why," the cause, there is simply the search for the "wherefore," the end.<sup>50</sup>

All of Melville's metaphysical novels,<sup>51</sup> then, were not primarily the products of an artist who had to record his vision but a religionist who searched for salvation--a salvation made dear but dreadful by a Calvinist God. His books were not the result of knowledge but were the seeking and the source for Truth. Sedgwick agrees with this distinction. "Not the forms in which the truth seemed to present itself, but his mind's urge out of its own deepest and universal nature to get at the truth was the source of vital interest."<sup>52</sup> Melville did not raise the questions to answer them; it was as though the "questions and their only

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<sup>49</sup>Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life, p. 212.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 36-37.

<sup>51</sup>"Metaphysics [or metaphysical speculation] in its essence, is always theology, and theology is born of imagination yoked to the service of life, of life with its craving for immortality" (Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life, p. 143).

<sup>52</sup>Sedgwick, Tragedy of Mind, p. 10.

possible answers were flashed out simultaneously."<sup>53</sup> As to whether the facts of Melville's experience became symbols, Sedgwick thought that

they share in the nature of the thing they symbolize. If this thing, this inward reality I speak of, is something more than an abstraction, it is nothing else than consciousness.<sup>54</sup>

This consciousness of Melville's, turned in on itself as it was in Pierre, may have helped him to eventually become master of himself<sup>55</sup> but at the time it made him very suspect not only to critics but to friends and family as well. Even before the publication of Pierre, but after Moby-Dick, a flirtatious neighbor of Melville's, Sarah Ann Morewood,<sup>56</sup> taunted him about his "insanity." In a letter

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>"We see in Pierre a man in the coils of horrible self-conflict. It was bound to take Melville a long time to recover from the consequences of this self-conflict. The nervous strain which worried his family did not last long. He recovered from it within a few months, as the remarkable composure and his command of tone and effect in his story Bartleby, written in 1853, sufficiently prove" (Sedgwick, Tragedy of Mind, p. 177).

<sup>56</sup>Those critics of Melville who make much of his "latent homosexuality" or his "maimed sexuality" apparently base their conclusions on Mrs. Glendinning, as Melville's mother, fostering an Oedipus complex in Herman, as well as Pierre; Melville's friendship with Richard Greene (Toby), Hawthorne (his "lover"); and his marriage to Elizabeth Shaw (Lucy--the "good angel" or Good Mother of the Good Mother-Bad Mother dichotomy)--a marriage which lacked sexual passion for she was "like a sister" (because Lemuel Shaw had given financial assistance to the family and therefore was like a father) to Melville. See James E. Miller, Jr., "Melville's Quest in Life and Art," SAQ, Autumn, 1959; Arvin, Herman Melville; Murray, "Introduction," and

to Evert Duyckinck she mentioned that "Mr. Herman" worked such long hours on his new book, without stopping to eat,

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Kligerman, "The Psychology of Herman Melville" as a few instances.

It is quite easy to dispose of the theories advanced by writers who see Melville as homosexually inclined. First, it is as preposterous to consider Mrs. Melvill as source for Mrs. Glendinning (see above, pp. 28-30) as it is unreasonable to equate her with Mrs. Morel in Sons and Lovers, even though certain of their situations are similar. Allan Melvill died as did Mr. Morel. William Morel died young as did Gansevoort Melvill--both the eldest sons. But there the similarity ends. Mrs. Melvill loved and respected her husband when he was alive, and after his death she relied on her brother, Peter Gansevoort, for emotional and financial sustenance--not on her sons. ("My dear Allan often use'd to say--'Maria you love Peter better than me or your Children,' and I assure you his Death has not made me love you less--you are everything to me--and for my sake take care of yourself" [Leyda, Log, p. 547].) Since one of Melville's grandchildren reported in a letter that someone had overheard Melville say he thought his mother hated him, psycho- and literary analysts have reconstructed that hearsay statement to mean that Melville hated, loved, and lusted after his mother, and therefore could not achieve sexual consummation in marriage without undergoing a subsequent breakdown. The suggestion that Melville looked on Elizabeth Shaw as a sister (incest!) because she was a friend of his sisters and was often in the house is an interesting conjecture, yet during Elizabeth Shaw's extended visits Melville was away at sea or from home most of the time. It is also suggested that Melville married Elizabeth Shaw to save her from being an old maid as a way of repaying Lemuel Shaw for his kindness to his family. Although Shaw had been a close friend of Allan Melvill's and he was concerned with the welfare of his friend's family, he--up to this time--had done little but advise on financial matters and assist in securing positions for Gansevoort. Certainly in dedicating Typee to Lemuel Shaw, Melville could feel he had discharged any personal debt the family owed him. Also at this stage in Melville's life, his self-respect was sufficient that he would look intolerantly on thrusting himself forward as a sacrificial offering. Melville was at a marrying-age when he had opportunity to know Elizabeth Shaw well and he apparently fell in love with her. At least he approached the marriage ceremony and endured the honeymoon with no apparent abnormalities in behavior. (See Davis and Gilman, Letters, and Leyda, Log, for this period.) On his wedding day he found a four-leaf clover, and nearly fifty years later



that "he must therefore write under a state of morbid excitement which will soon injure his health--I laughed at

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he could remind his wife that it had been, as he thought then, an auspicious emblem. (See Melville's Weeds and Wildings Chiefly.) Melville was sufficiently male that in the years of 1850 and 1851 he could--in the two months' absence of Mrs. Melville at Boston during her confinement--respond (how completely--or for how long--is not known) to the feminine machinations of a near neighbor, Sarah Ann Morewood. Only a few letters survive but those which do are revelatory of Melville's heightened emotional response. In Mrs. Morewood's letters to the Duyckincks, she but thinly hides her attraction for Melville. Her neighbors described her as a restless, emotionally-charged woman, forever in search of excitement. (She has been suggested as the inspiration for the heroine for Elsie Venner, a book by Oliver Wendell Holmes, a neighbor of the Morewoods, Melvilles, and Hawthornes.) Mrs. Morewood planned numerous outings, dinners, parties and picnics to which Melville invariably went. She catered to his interests by giving him books. His letters of appreciation reveal his pleasure in being the object of so much attention. It is interesting that so much attention has been paid to the apparent dissolvment of the exalted and feverish friendship Melville and Hawthorne had without consideration of the existing documents which reveal no such rupture. Those who like to see Melville as homosexually inclined say it was Hawthorne's leaving the Berkshires and the ending of their friendship that caused Melville to deteriorate so rapidly as an artist and as a man. Besides the fact that their friendship did not end--Melville visited Hawthorne in Liverpool for several days on his way to the Holy Land in 1856 and again on his return in 1857--both maintained a keen interest in one another's writings. Both men were writers and they both were hesitant to interrupt the other at work. Probably had Mrs. Morewood not plied Melville with such frequent invitations while Mrs. Melville was visiting at her father's home, Melville would through loneliness have risked interrupting Hawthorne for a visit. (Once when he visited Hawthorne and Hawthorne was in his room writing, Melville insisted on remaining downstairs in a study reading for several hours until Hawthorne naturally descended after finishing his work.) It must be remembered, too, that Melville by this stage of his unfolding was becoming almost hypersensitive to the reactions of others. In his letters to Hawthorne, he shows himself to be reacting to Hawthorne's probable reactions, and rewriting, apologizing or explaining his views as he goes along. Such was his growing and deepening consciousness of human emotions, reactions. With Hawthorne, Melville had almost a

him somewhat and told him that the recluse life he was leading made his city friends think that he was slightly

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spiritual communication. In most of his friendships with men (Duyckinck, Adler, Taylor, Hoadley, Billson, etc.) the attraction was an intellectual one. When one considers how isolated Melville was from thinking people in his family and among his relatives, it is not surprising that he reacted with such enthusiasm to those few persons he met with whom he could converse on metaphysical subjects. Yet up until the time Melville met Hawthorne, no one really knew what he felt and saw, except dead men--the writers of the classics from which Melville profited so much by reading. Melville's rapture at reading Hawthorne and then having the opportunity to meet him was inspired by that powerful relief of knowing that finally there was someone with whom he could talk. Those critics who label this excitement as a sexual passion of Melville for Hawthorne have no understanding of the loneliness of that person whose vision is different from that of everyone around him. His spiritual starvation, however, is not a sexual one. In man, it is fairly well recognized that sexual needs predominate over intellectual needs. It was not Melville's sexual hunger that caused him to so rapturously hail Hawthorne; it was their spiritual kinship. While Mrs. Melville was gone from home, it was not to Hawthorne's house that Melville tramped (Hawthorne lived but a few miles from Melville) but to his neighbors, the Morewoods. Even to hear what Hawthorne might have to say about Moby-Dick, Melville did not go down the road to Hawthorne's. "Your letter was handed me last night on the road going to Mr. Morewood's, and I read it there. Had I been at home, I would have sat down at once and answered it" (Davis and Gilman, Letters, p. 142). It wasn't Mr. Morewood's company that Melville sought (Morewood thought Melville was a boor); it was the female company of Sarah Ann, who was attending him so solicitously in his wife's absence.

When Melville left Pittsfield, he conducted a grand burning of letters, documents, etc. Only the letters he wrote to Mrs. Morewood (and perhaps not all of them) and the letters Sarah Ann Morewood wrote to other persons than Melville survive to throw light on this relationship. Because Melville scholars and analysts spend so much of their time and energy on trying to recreate Melville's life from the lives of his fictional characters, they have little time left to appraise the real-life documents that do exist. These documents do not prove that Melville was ever unfaithful to Mrs. Melville, but they do indicate that he was "heterosexually interested." For further instances,

insane--he replied that long ago he came to the same conclusion himself but if he left home to look after Hungary the cause in hunger would suffer."<sup>57</sup> Although this jibing was a friendly one, the accusations questioning Melville's sanity by the readers and reviewers of Pierre were not. Those who restrained themselves from calling Melville insane said he was a pessimist, which in 1851 was nearly as damning.

In an article entitled "The American Pessimist" written in 1892, one year after Melville's death, Gamaliel Bradford, Jr., wrote in the Atlantic Monthly that "Pessimism is a philosophy greatly in repute now."<sup>58</sup> This was not the case in 1851; pessimism then was un-American. Although pessimism as a passing mood was common to all men, pessimism as a philosophy ran counter to the natural inclinations of man, Bradford explained.

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consult the fiction Typee (which Melville swore was true-life experience) and Melville's journal of his trip to Palestine. As low as was his general morale in 1856, even then his masculine spirits could be lifted by the attention of women: "Tumbler in narrow street. Blocked way. Balconies with women. Cloth on ground. They gave way, after natural reluctance. Merriment. Turned round and gave the most grateful and graceful bow I could. Handkerchiefs waved from balconies, good humored cries etc.--Felt prouder than an Emperor" (Weaver, Journal up the Straits, p. 112).

<sup>57</sup>Luther Stearns Mansfield, "Glimpses of Herman Melville's Life in Pittsfield, 1850-1851," American Literature, IX (March, 1937), 48.

<sup>58</sup>Gamaliel Bradford, Jr., "The American Pessimist," Atlantic Monthly, LXIX (March, 1892), 363. This article makes no mention of Melville.

To believe deliberately that the whole universe exists for nothing but evil, misery, and suffering; that there is a power, or an unconscious force, which finds a pleasure, or follows a natural tendency, in the mere causing of destruction . . .<sup>59</sup>

was too defeating for practical people to consider. Although Melville, in Moby-Dick, Pierre, and The Confidence-Man posited the idea of a malignancy or satanic force operating in the Universe, he himself never totally endorsed the philosophy of pessimism, to the extent that he considered himself a pessimist. In a letter written to James Billson in 1885, he said

Altho' neither pessimist nor optimist myself, nevertheless I relish it /the pessimism of James Thomson, poet friend of Billson's/ in the verse if for nothing else than as a counterpoise to the exorbitant hopefulness, juvenile and shallow, that makes such a bluster in these days--at least, in some quarters.<sup>60</sup>

Melville even in 1851 understood human nature sufficiently well that he could not be swept along by the exorbitant hopes for democracy and claims for the perfectability of man current then. Observation, experience and deep diving in thought had brought him too great an awareness of the human tendency toward evil to allow him pleasure in holding--as once he had however briefly<sup>61</sup>--such a romantic notion.

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Davis and Gilman, Letters, p. 277.

<sup>61</sup>See Perry Miller, The Raven and the Whale (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1956), pp. 167-219 for Melville's involvement with the Young America group. In a chapter entitled "A Berkshire Idyl," Miller asserts

Realist Melville would have accepted as a definition of himself, but not pessimist. The American pessimist of 1892, with certain characteristics in common with Melville, was not truly a pessimist either, Bradford explained.

The true, incurable pessimist, is not, perhaps, a pessimist at all. He does not rail, or curse God, or despise man. If his state of mind can be described, it is by saying that he has thought, not himself, but everything besides himself, into a shadow. He is a man who has embarked on the wide sea of intellectual discovery, and has found that for him it is a barren sea, blank, desolate,--a sea shoreless, where the traveler voyages on aimlessly forever in a misty void. He is a man

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Melville wrote "Hawthorne and his Mosses" in an attempt to align Hawthorne with Young America nationalist policies. His assessment is inaccurate and misrepresents Melville. Harrison Hayford wrote a doctoral dissertation at Yale in 1942, in which he attempted to prove that Melville knew Hawthorne before he wrote "Hawthorne and His Mosses" and that Evert Duyckinck encouraged and hurried Melville in the writing of it during the week Melville met Hawthorne (at the beginning of Duyckinck's week-long visit) for the first time. Perry Miller not only accepted Hayford's conjectural thesis but asserted it as a fact. Hayford himself now admits that new evidence has "weakened his case." (Personal conversation.) The new evidence is the letter from Sophia Hawthorne to her mother in which she mentions that Herman Melville told her that he had written the article before meeting Hawthorne. "We have discovered who wrote the Review in the Literary World ["Hawthorne and His Mosses"]. It was no other than Herman Melville himself! He had no idea when he wrote it that he should ever meet Mr. Hawthorne" (Eleanore Metcalf, Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953], p. 91). Sophia believed, as all those who knew him well, that Melville was an honest man: "His truth and honesty shine out at every point" (Ibid., p. 91).

Also, Miller treats Melville as much more of a political animal than he ever was. It is questionable that Melville had any ulterior purpose in writing his praise of Hawthorne's Mosses from an Old Manse, and it is doubtful that he deliberately lied to Mrs. Hawthorne when he told her he had already written the article before meeting Hawthorne.

for whom the fevered, passionate whirl of life, so fierce, so intense, so real, to other men, is but a disordered dream,--a dream of which no one knows the beginning, and no one can prophesy the end. He is a man to whom the present is a reality only in comparison with the utter darkness of the future and the past,--a man to whom faith and hope are shadows, and charity is the emptiest and vainest of superstructures, from which all foundation has been eaten away.<sup>62</sup> (My emphasis.)

Bradford does not mention Melville in his article but the last two sentences of the above paragraph epitomize the fictional figures of Pierre and the Confidence-Man. Pierre is asked, "Then why torment thyself so, Pierre?" and he answers "It is the law. . . . That a nothing should torment a nothing; for I am a nothing. It is all a dream--we dream that we dreamed a dream" (Pierre, p. 322). Melville's Confidence-Man demonstrated that charity indeed was but an empty and vain structure, but all of Melville's fictional characters occupied hazardous terrain of beliefs which Melville's own commitment of mind did not allow him to hold. But because he was sufficiently sensitive to all human suffering, Melville could empathize with such pessimists as

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<sup>62</sup>Bradford, "The American Pessimist," p. 365.

Thomson,<sup>63</sup> Leopardi,<sup>64</sup> and Schopenhauer<sup>65</sup>--referred to by Bradford as "shrieking fanatic[s] who . . . [p]arade their own despair in the eyes of an unsympathetic world"<sup>66</sup>--without sharing their total outlook. What Unamuno has to say about Leopardi (and Spinoza and Thomson in different contexts) is revelatory in that it throws light on what many analysts have defined as Melville's "will to self-annihilation."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>See Davis and Gilman, Letters, pp. 277, 283. As an indication of how keenly Melville felt about immortality, note his comment about Thomson: "If one considers the poet's career, one could heave a big sigh for the fatality inverting so genial a spirit. But perhaps the gods may make it all up to him wherever he now may sojourn. If they do not, the shabby fellows ought to be ashamed of themselves." (This letter to James Billson was written in 1886 when much of Melville's torment and anguish had subsided to a less caustic outrage against the fates.)

<sup>64</sup>See Clarel, p. 45.

<sup>65</sup>Olive Fite, "The Interpretation of Melville's Billy Budd," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University, 1955), passim. See also William Braswell, "Herman Melville and Christianity (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1934), passim. Both Fite and Braswell devote considerable space to discussion of Melville's marginalia in the Schopenhauer books he acquired and read in the late 1880s. Melville checked and underlined many passages, including the following sentence, in which T. Bailey Saunders in his introduction to The Wisdom of Life states that in the opinion of Schopenhauer "the foremost truth which Christianity proclaimed to the world lay in its recognition of pessimism, its view that the world was essentially corrupt, and that the devil was its prince or ruler" (Fite, "Interpretation," p. 165).

<sup>66</sup>Bradford, Jr., "The American Pessimist," p. 366.

<sup>67</sup>Murray, "Introduction," p. xvii. Also see Kligerman, "The Psychology of Herman Melville," p. 141. "We can only conjecture what effect the loss of his two sons had on

Leopardi, the poet of sorrow, of annihilation, having lost the ultimate illusion, that of believing in his immortality . . . spoke to his heart of *l'infinita vanita del tutto* [infinite vanity of existence], and perceived how close is the kinship between love and death, and how "when love is born deep down in the heart, simultaneously a languid and weary desire to die is felt in the breast." The greater part of those who see death at their own hand are moved thereto by love; it is the supreme longing for life, for more life; the longing to prolong and perpetuate life, that urges them to death, once they are persuaded of the vanity of this longing.<sup>68</sup>

The fact that he never did commit suicide may be attributable in part to his recurrent hope for immortality which was never totally defeated by his anguished and persisting disbelief in universal immortality. Certainly the subject of immortality was one which occupied much space in Melville's mind. Journal entries and letters to friends written by acquaintances of Melville indicate (in varying degrees of appreciation) his extensive aptitude for talking on metaphysical issues.<sup>69</sup>

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his structural conflict. There is tragic irony in the way Malcolm in his act of self-destruction, responded to the destructive wish in his father's unconscious."

<sup>68</sup>Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life, pp. 44-45. Unamuno also believed that "the majority of suicides would not take their lives if they had the assurance that they would never die on this earth. The self-slayer kills himself because he will not wait for death" (p. 233).

<sup>69</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne in his journal: "After supper, I put Julian to bed; and Melville and I had a talk about time and eternity, things of this world and of the next" (Log, p. 419); Titus Coan to his mother: " . . . soon found myself in a full tide of talk--or rather of monologue. . . . In vain I sought to hear of Typee and



In all of his books, Melville mentions immortality and in White-Jacket he refers repeatedly to the subject. Immortality is the key discussion topic between Babbalanja, Mohi, Yoomy, and Media in Mardi. (Taji, though the narrator and chief character of the book, has but a few lines of dialogue.) Indirectly immortality is at issue in Moby-Dick and Pierre. In The Confidence-Man, the devil in his many disguises signs up souls for hell.

When deaths occurred in his wife's or his family, Melville expressed the concern that God would deal kindly with the parted one. In a letter to his Uncle Peter in which he thanked him for offering to provide the money with which to publish Clarel, he wrote, "I pray God to bless you, and have you in His keeping" (Letters, p. 244). Although Melville's interest in immortality naturally was personal,

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those Paradise islands, but he preferred to pour forth his philosophy and his theories of life. The shade of Aristototele arose like a cold mist between myself and Fayaway. . . . When I left him he was in full tide of discourse on all things sacred and profane" (Leyda, Log, p. 605); Henry Sanford Gansevoort to his father, Peter: "When he [Melville] essays philosophy he seeks to ascend by waxen wings from his proper sphere only to find his mind dazzled his wings miled and his fall mortifying" (Paltsits, "Family Correspondence," p. 517); Evert Duyckinck to his diary: "Herman Melville passed the evening with me--fresh from his mountain charged to the muzzle with his sailor metaphysics and jargon of things unknowable. . . . Melville instanced old Burton as atheistical--in the exquisite irony of his passages on some sacred matters" (Leyda, Log, p. 523); "Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken" (The English Notebooks, ed. Randall Stewart /New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1941, p. 432).

he objected violently to the doctrine of an elect. He no more believed in an elect society in Heaven than he did in an earthly one. He knew in each man the hope for immortality and the desire for fair treatment on earth was as real and as valid as that desire in any other man, including himself. In Moby-Dick, Melville had made an impassioned plea (almost like a reminder to God) when he noted the divinity "which has no robed investiture" residing in his lowly whale-hunters:

Thou shalt see it shining in the arm that wields a pick or drives a spike; that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God; Himself! The great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality!

If, then, to meanest mariners, and renegades and cast-aways, I shall hereafter ascribe high qualities, though dark; weave around them tragic graces; if even the most mournful, perchance the most abased, among them all, shall at times lift himself to the exalted mounts; if I shall touch that workman's arm with some ethereal light; if I shall spread a rainbow over his disastrous set of sun; then against all mortal critics bear me out in it, thou just Spirit of Equality, which has spread one royal mantle of humanity over all my kind! Bear me out in it, thou great democratic God! (Moby-Dick, p. 114). (My emphasis.)

Both F. O. Matthiessen and Howard Vincent see Melville's tragic vision growing out of his belief in the unique value and equality in right to dignity of each man, as he witnessed over the years the violation or destruction of that value and right.<sup>70</sup> Melville at one point apologized to

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<sup>70</sup>F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (London, Toronto and New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 442-445; and Vincent, Trying-Out of Moby-Dick, p. 104.

Hawthorne for his apparent inconsistency in being able to accept that superior minds by intense cultivation could join together in an aristocracy of feeling when he also believed that "a thief in jail is as honorable a personage as Gen. George Washington."<sup>71</sup> Consciously perhaps Melville never was aware of it, but this "ruthless democracy" of his, as he termed it, was undoubtedly a subconscious reaction to his aversion to the doctrine of an elect. Sometimes Melville could temporarily forget it in his enthusiasm for the equality of mankind. When Melville reviewed The California and Oregon Trail, his only real criticism of the book was directed against Parkman for his treatment of the Indians:

In a brief and appropriate preface Mr. Parkman adverts to the representations of the Indian character given by poets and novelists, which he asserts are for the most part mere creations of fancy. He adds that "the Indian is certainly entitled to a high rank among savages, but his good qualities are not those of an Uncas or Outalissa." Now, this is not to be gainsaid. But when in the body of the book we are informed that it is difficult for any white man, after a domestication among the Indians, to hold them much better than brutes; when we are told, too, that to such a person, the slaughter of an Indian is indifferent as the slaughter of a buffalo; with all deference, we beg leave to dissent.

It is too often the case, that civilized beings sojourning among savages soon come to regard them with disdain and contempt. But though in many cases this feeling is almost natural, it is not defensible; and it is wholly wrong. Why should we condemn them? Because we are better than they? Assuredly not; for herein we are rebuked by the story of the Publican and the

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<sup>71</sup>Davis and Gilman, Letters, pp. 126-127.

Pharisee. Because, then, that in many things we are happier? But this should be ground for commiseration, not disdain. . . . We are all of us--Anglo-Saxons, Dyaks, and Indians--sprung from one head, and made in one image. And if we regret this brotherhood now, we shall be forced to join hands hereafter. A misfortune is not a fault; and good luck is not meritorious. The savage is born a savage; and the civilized being but inherits his civilization, nothing more.<sup>72</sup>

This review was written in 1849, after Melville had made the transition, which he told Hawthorne about in the letter written in 1851 (previously quoted, p. 48). from dormant seed to matured bulb. (Metaphorically, Melville had the same development a seed has which grows into a bulb; the flowering, the release of experience, was yet to come.) Melville had, in fact--by the time the above review was written--ripped a few leaves from the bulb, although he still retained a vestige of his youthful optimism. Although his fictional scout, Babbalanja, had already conducted great and long discussion sessions on the possibility for immortality and had asserted that it was better for all men to be "annihilated" than for one man to be damned, Melville--writing in his own person and as his own spokesman--still could foresee the day when all men would "join hands hereafter" in the hereafter.

But with the unfolding within himself and the exposing of experience which had been submerged for many

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<sup>72</sup>/Herman Melville<sup>7</sup>, "Mr. Parkman's Tour," The Literary World, IV (March 31, 1849), 291.

years, Melville meditated on the dogmatisms of Calvinism which he had absorbed in his youth and he tried to test them against what he could experience and observe as an adult. The great spark of kinship he recognized in Hawthorne, when he read his Mosses from an Old Manse, had caused him to state in 1850

Certain it is . . . that this great power of blackness in him derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from Whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free. For, in certain moods, no man can weigh the world, without throwing in something, somehow like Original Sin, to strike the uneven balance.<sup>73</sup>

In the following years after this article was written, Melville became more and more thoughtful and the occasional "mood" became a continual outlook of mind. From 1850 through the writing of the Confidence-Man in 1856 Melville probed into the condition of depravity in man and the evil in the world, and he came to the conclusion that man was not only victim of evil but an accomplice as well. What made man depraved if it weren't for Original Sin? "Does not God, then wrong man?" by so putting him at a disadvantage? The catechism response in the negative he had learned as a child did not satisfy his adult reasoning.

Demonism was a response to the question of evil

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<sup>73</sup>/Herman Melville<sup>7</sup>, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," The Portable Melville, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: The Viking Press, 1965), p. 406.

which Melville explored in literature. In The Belgic Confession the Calvinist attitude about demons had been outlined:

He hath also created the angels good, to be his messengers, and to serve his elect; some of whom are fallen from that excellency, in which God created them, into everlasting perdition. . . . The devils and evil spirits are so depraved, that they are enemies of God and every good thing, to the utmost of their power, as murderers, watching to ruin the Church and every member thereof, and by their wicked stratagems to destroy all: and are, therefore, by their own wickedness, adjudged to eternal damnation, daily expecting their horrible torments. Therefore we reject and abhor the error of the Sadducees, who deny the existence of spirits and angels: and also that of the Manichees, who assert that the devils have their origin of themselves, and that they are wicked of their own nature, without having been corrupted.<sup>74</sup>

That Melville gave some credence to the theory of devil-worship is revealed in a short passage in the chapter, "Stubb's Supper," in Moby-Dick which followed a description of the behavior of the sharks (little different from men when blind to any other emotion but their greed) lined up for devouring the dead carcass of the whale after "the smoking horror and diabolism" of the fight at sea. "If you have never seen that sight, then suspend your decision about the propriety of devil-worship, and the expediency of conciliating the devil" (Moby-Dick, p. 293). Though

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<sup>74</sup>"The Confession of Faith," Article XII, Constitution, p. 45, as quoted by Ward, "Herman Melville: The Forms and Forces," p. 30.

not totally separate, the love-principle and the demon-principle are explored in Pierre. The demon-principle is that which destroys beauty and goodness and replaces them with woe and want. In The Confidence-Man, the principle figure is Satan in various forms of disguise. The Devil does a rollicking business aboard the steamer Fidele for as every good confidence man knows, "You can not cheat an honest man."

Because in Pierre the fictional hero committed suicide after he came to the realization that a virtuous and a truthful man could not live in this world and in The Confidence-Man, the passengers aboard the ship ignored and abused the Christ-figure proclaiming the Biblical attributes of charity and gave their attention and sympathies to the devil in his disguises, Melville's reputation as a writer and as a man declined markedly. Even members of Melville's family worried about his sanity.<sup>75</sup> At this stage in Melville's life, he was at that impasse to which Charles Glicksberg believes the modern hero as "rebellious victim" may be brought by his defiant will in his "irrepressible need to discover 'the truth' about life and 'the truth' about the self, however absurd that truth turns out to be."<sup>76</sup> Yet Glicksberg also believes that it is this

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<sup>75</sup>Metcalf, Cycle and Epicycle, pp. 159-161.

<sup>76</sup>Charles I. Glicksberg, The Self in Modern Literature (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State Press, 1963), p. 185.

continual searching which keeps the negativist from becoming nihilist: "The self that knows itself to be lost and seeks out the reasons for its spiritual lostness is not utterly lost."<sup>77</sup> The modern hero, Glicksberg says, is in a "perpetual process of becoming."<sup>78</sup>

Up to the day of Melville's death he also was always in this "perpetual process of becoming." His tragic vision was at its zenith, his health was in severe repair after the years of steady writing, and his reputation as a popular author had been destroyed by his truth-telling, but in 1856 when Melville was allowed to take an extensive trip through the generosity of his father-in-law, he went to the Holy Land. Even though this area was a popular tourist attraction in mid-nineteenth century, Melville did not go as a typical tourist because it was the place to go but because he hoped to find at the source of the Christian birth answers to the questions that had perplexed him all his life. The fact that the Holy Land disappointed him and made him only doubt the more may have been the event that confirmed Melville as an undoubting doubter.

But while still enroute to the Holy Land, Melville, after arriving in England, immediately went to see Hawthorne in Liverpool. It is from the notes Hawthorne wrote

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. xii.



in his notebook about this visit that we have the most definite testimony to the extent to which the question of immortality weighed on Melville's soul.

He stayed with us from Tuesday till Thursday; and, on the intervening day, we took a pretty long walk together, and sat down in a hollow among the sand hills (sheltering ourselves from the high, cool wind) and smoked a cigar. Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had "pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated"; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. It is strange how he persists --and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before--in wandering to-and-fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. If he were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential; he has a very high and noble nature, and better worth immortality than most of us.<sup>79</sup>

Hawthorne was right when he saw through Melville's declaration that he had made up his mind to be annihilated when he commented that he did not seem "to rest in that anticipation." From the context of the passage, it would appear that Melville was speaking about annihilation in reference to an after-life; certainly Hawthorne would have been more concerned if he thought Melville contemplated suicide. It is possible at this point in Melville's religious questioning that he had stopped believing in, or hoping for, life after

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<sup>79</sup>Hawthorne, The English Notebooks, p. 432.

death; yet it is improbable. If so, though, his thoughts on being annihilated could refer to his attempts at literary immortality and this is the area in which he had "pretty much" given up.<sup>80</sup> Either definition of immortality would suffice, though, for Melville did not rest in the anticipation of either annihilation. In Mardi, Babbalanja had declared, "the undoubting doubter believes the most," and in his life, Melville gave testimony to this adage. As Unamuno had seen,

We must needs long for it [immortality], however absurd it may appear to us; nay, more, we must needs believe in it, in some way or another, in order that we may live. . . . We must needs believe in it, and to believe in it is to be religious.<sup>81</sup>

"If he were a religious man," Hawthorne wrote, but in this phrase his perception failed, for Melville was a religious man. "The longing for the immortality of the soul, for the permanence, in some form or another, of our personal and individual consciousness, is as much of the

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<sup>80</sup>Howard Vincent evidently assumes it is literary immortality that Melville has given up on. "Convinced, after the failure of The Confidence-Man, that fame and fortune were not to be achieved by fiction, Melville had made up his mind to be 'annihilated.' In the independence of annihilation Melville was at liberty to follow his own literary desires; freed from the hope of making his living by writing novels, he might now find his private creative outlet in the intensities of poetry." Howard P. Vincent, Collected Poems of Herman Melville (Chicago: Packard and Company, Hendricks House, 1947), p. viii. From the context of the full quote, it would appear that Hawthorne assumed he was speaking of a theological immortality.

<sup>81</sup>Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life, p. 257.

essence of religion," Unamuno wrote, "as is the longing that there may be a God. The one does not exist apart from the other, the reason being that fundamentally they are one and the same thing."<sup>82</sup>

All of Melville's fictional characters took part in searches or quests; what they were questing has been variously labeled as God, Truth, Beauty, Perfection, Happiness, Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the Mysterious Forces of Life. Whatever the individual quests of Ahab, Taji, Pierre, Clarel, the total of their searchings is subsumed in the all-encompassing quest for immortality of their creator. It was his very essence. He also knew this was the essence of all men, from king to leper. As Howard Vincent wrote, a knowledge such as Melville's required

a full appreciation of human worth beyond human weakness and failure. It requires the recognition of Whitman's truth that "the least developed person on earth is just as important and sacred to himself or herself, as the most developed person is to himself or herself."<sup>83</sup>

Such a knowledge made it impossible for Melville to praise God and to thank Him for His goodness when He saved his arm, or leg, or neck while ripping those limbs from the man standing next to him. That man also loved his life and his limb. To believe or not to believe, that was the question for Melville. Unamuno said about Spinoza, because

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>83</sup>Vincent, Trying-Out, pp. 104-105.

he could not believe in his own personal immortality, that all his philosophy was but a consolation which he contrived for his lack of faith. Just as other men have a pain in a hand or foot, heart-ache or head-ache, so he had God-ache."<sup>84</sup>

The raging ache that Melville had was also a "God-ache." As much as he wondered about the source of evil in the Universe, he also wondered about that "something unaccountable, something unanalyzable and incomprehensible, something mysterious in the scheme of things, in 'God's ways'"<sup>85</sup> which was at the source of his Calvinist Protestantism.

[The Calvinist dogmatism] led him to believe or to hope that, beyond all the apparent formlessness, wildness and anarchy of experience, there was an ultimate Rationality, an absolute order and purpose, in the knowledge of which one could reassuringly abide. They led him also to believe or to hope that, beyond all the moral and physical evil in human affairs, beyond wickedness and suffering, there was an absolute Goodness or Justice on which one could unquestioningly rely.<sup>86</sup>

The Calvinist dogmatism never led Melville to believe-- but only to hope. He could neither believe, nor disbelieve, but grasped "the parting" and sustained the Breach in his self. He sent off fictional agents to test the terrain of the Breach and in conversation, in thought and in study he

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<sup>84</sup>Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life, p. 7.

<sup>85</sup>Arvin, Herman Melville, p. 34.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., pp. 34-35.

wandered again and again over the desolate grounds of metaphysical speculation, looking for any hidden trails he might have missed and not followed through which would still lead him to the desired goal of sincere belief. He could not stop tormenting himself, which he could tolerate, nor tormenting others, which they could not, by questioning the religious principles by which they all supposedly lived. Unamuno said that he thought Oliver Wendell Holmes was not "altogether wide of the mark" when he had a character in "The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table" say that he

thought better of those who were confined in a lunatic asylum on account of religious mania than of those who, while professing the same religious principles, kept their wits and appeared to enjoy life very well outside of the asylums.<sup>87</sup>

Holmes, a neighbor of the Melvilles in the Berkshires, may have thought on this possibility when he was called by Mrs. Melville in the summer of 1855 ostensibly to check on Melville's physical health, but to advise, also, on his mental health. Although Melville's "health" deteriorated in the following year to the extent that his father-in-law financed a trip to the Holy Land so that he might return physically refreshed, Melville's family were more concerned that he return mentally refreshed.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life, pp. 257-258.

<sup>88</sup>See Merton M. Sealts, Jr.'s article, "Herman Melville's 'I and My Chimney,'" pp. 248-249, for a discussion of Melville's relatives' concern about his mental health. Printed in The Recognition of Herman Melville, ed. Hershel Parker (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967).

The trip, in fact, only confirmed in Melville his tragic sense of life and gave him background material for the 20,000-line poem, Clarel, which was published in 1876.<sup>89</sup> In this poem Melville reviewed all the theological problems and arguments that had passed through his mind during all the years of his doubt. In a letter to Hawthorne, written in 1851, he had remarked that the pleasant weather had recalled him from "certain crotchety and over doleful chimearas, the like of which men like you and me and some others, forming a chain of God's posts round the world, must be content to encounter now and then, and fight them the best way we can."<sup>90</sup> A quarter century later he could look back on that experience which had provided much more than just "doleful chimearas." His reputation fell so low that he could not find publishers willing to risk publishing his works; his oldest son committed suicide at the age of eighteen; his second son, a ne'er do well, died before he reached the age of thirty-five; and he, himself, had to go to work at the menial task of outdoors custom inspector at a salary of four dollars a day to support his family. "But go mad I can not: I maintain/  
The perilous outpost of the sane (Clarel, Vol. II, Part I,

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<sup>89</sup>Undoubtedly it was Lizzie again who hinted in the right family direction, for Peter Gansevoort heard about the manuscript and he gratuitously offered to pay publication costs. Melville was ecstatic; many copies of a published book could not all get lost.

<sup>90</sup>Davis and Gilman, Letters, p. 132.

canto xix, p. 95).

Before taking the post, Melville tried the lecture circuit and failed.<sup>91</sup> Although he did receive sufficient engagements to provide some income for support of his family, his gift was not in public speaking. When he had the opportunity of the outdoor inspector's post, the lowest on the customs officers' scale, he accepted it with relief. Then for over a twenty-year period--more concentratedly in the last ten--Melville after his daily job wrote for long and lonely hours of exhaustive effort the work which was to become Clarel.

Clarel is a religious poem. It is a poem about life and death, and it is a poem which reveals Melville's impassioned longing for life after death. Unamuno said "We must needs believe in that other life in order that we may live this life, and endure it, and give it meaning and finality."<sup>92</sup> Melville could not believe; but he could hope. If there were no life after death, then Melville knew this life had no meaning. The only way he could endure it was to hope hard enough that his hope was almost a belief. "And we must needs believe in that other life, perhaps, in order that we may deserve it, in order that we may obtain it, for it may be that he neither deserves

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<sup>91</sup>Merton M. Sealts, Jr., Melville as Lecturer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 109, and passim.

<sup>92</sup>Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life, p. 258.

it nor will obtain it who does not passionately desire it above reason and, if need be, against reason."<sup>93</sup> This again is a statement by Unamuno but it is a testimony of Melville's life. At this point in his life during the writing of Clarel, Melville had no external reason to believe in himself as an immortal artist; he was a failure in the eyes of the world. He had recanted on his earlier expectation that Mardi might "flower like the aloe, a hundred years hence"<sup>94</sup> for he could see its serious flaws, and he had never held out high hopes for Moby-Dick or Pierre. Clarel was his last hope for literary immortality. With old age coming on, it was now imperative that if he were to succeed as an artist he must write for the ages, not for his time. When Clarel was in the bookstores and didn't sell, he withdrew the books. He had anticipated its unpopularity. On the first edition he had imprinted on the flyleaf "I here dismiss the book--content beforehand with whatever future awaits it." Its reception in his lifetime was unimportant; it was the judgment of posterity that mattered to him. He wrote his young friend, James Billson, that Clarel was a work "eminently adapted for unpopularity."<sup>95</sup> As Melville had told his father-in-law

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Davis and Gilman, Letters, p. 102.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 275.



thirty-five years earlier, this was exactly the kind of book he longed to write. "So far as I am individually concerned, & independent of my pocket, it is my earnest desire to write those sort of books which are said to 'fail.'"<sup>96</sup> Whether Clarel will ever flower like the aloe, it finally has been discovered, nearly a hundred years hence, by posterity.

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

## CHAPTER IV

### LAST SAIL UNFURLED

HERMAN MELVILLE

by Conrad Aiken

"My towers at last!"--

What meant the words  
from what acknowledged circuit sprung  
and in the heart and on the tongue  
at sight of few familiar birds  
when seaward his last sail unfurled  
to leeward from the wheel once more  
bloomed the pale crags of haunted shore  
that once-more-visited notch of world:  
and straight he knew as known before  
the Logos in Levianthan's roar  
he deepest sounding with his lead  
who all had fathomed all had said.

Much-loving hero--towers indeed  
were those that overhung your log  
with entries of typhoon and fog  
and thunderstone for Adam's breed:  
man's warm Sargasso Sea of faith  
dislimned in light by luck or fate  
you for mankind set sail by hate  
and weathered it, and with it death.  
And now at world's end coasting late  
in delphined calms beyond the gate  
which Hercules flung down, you come  
to the grim rocks that nod you home.

Depth below depth this love of man:  
among unnumbered and unknown  
to mark and make his cryptic own  
one landfall of all time began:  
of all life's hurts to treasure one  
and hug it to the wounded breast,  
and this to dedicate the rest,  
all injuries received or done.  
Your towers again but towers now blest  
your haven in a shoreless west  
O mariner of the human soul  
who in the landmark notched the Pole  
and in the Item loved the Whole.

## LAST SAIL UNFURLED

Herman Melville's genius as a writer was discovered in the second and third decades of the twentieth century. For about twenty-five years after Moby-Dick was assigned the category of work of art, Clarel continued to be consistently dismissed as a bad poem with an uninteresting plot and monotonous characters. In the last few years though, the critics have been less damning. This reflects less a change in taste than the fact that, as Bezanson has so aptly written, it has only been recently that "its critics have begun to read the poem."<sup>1</sup> And for those few who have read and re-read the poem "in some corners there is even enthusiasm."<sup>2</sup> The group has unfortunately still remained so small that few literary analysts of creative and intuitive inclinations have undertaken studies in depth. ("You cannot come to know greatness by inspecting it; there is no glimpse to be caught of it, except by intuition.")<sup>3</sup> The research scholar, with his particular abilities and limitations, has annotated a definitive text and drawn his

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<sup>1</sup>Walter E. Bezanson (ed.), Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1960), p. xlix.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Jay Leyda (ed.), "Hawthorne and His Mosses" by Herman Melville, The Portable Melville (New York: The Viking Press, 1952), p. 407.

well-documented conclusions, but there still remains the task of several analyses by perceptive and learned students of literature and of mankind. The skill of the one discipline without a profound concern and wonder of what it is to be human is not sufficient for any study of Melville or his works. Melville was first a tormented man, then he became an artist through his struggle to understand his torment (Solomon's torment, Job's torment, Hamlet's torment).

The extent to which Melville was under a strain while writing Clarel is apparent from the letters Mrs. Melville (Lizzie) wrote to family members. She referred to Clarel as a "dreadful incubus of a book" as it produced in her husband such nervous states and anxiety that she had to ask relatives to stay away until its completion.<sup>4</sup> The amount of energy and sustained intensity of vision required for the writing of Clarel was far greater than for any other of his books. In addition, when Melville commenced to write Clarel, he was holding down a full-time job and he was a middle-aged man.

Leon Howard believes that Clarel, as a work of art, does not achieve emotional and imaginative coherence because "Melville himself was no longer deeply concerned with the conflict of belief which lifted Moby Dick to heights of

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<sup>4</sup>Leyda, Log, p. 747. Lizzie wrote Catherine Lansing, "I shall be so thankful when it is all finished and off of his mind, and cannot help hoping that his health will improve when he is released from this long continued mental strain." Ibid., p. 748.

poetic intensity."<sup>5</sup> Howard maintains that Melville was more concerned with the men behind the beliefs than the beliefs they held. It is difficult to accept this distinction. It hardly seems probable that Melville would spend many desperate years filled with the tortured writing of eighteen thousand lines of verse concerning metaphysical subjects if he were not deeply concerned about his own "conflict of belief." Merlin Bowen in an introductory passage on the character Clarel wrote, "A lapsed divinity student who has come to the Holy Land in the hope of recovering his faith, he holds himself perhaps a little too conscientiously to that task. Men interest him, of course, but chiefly in their opinions and beliefs."<sup>6</sup> (My emphasis.) All of the characters who appear in Clarel embody full-blown beliefs or fairly set attitudes toward acceptance of, or avoidance of, reality, except Clarel. He is in a perpetual process of learning: "learning, unlearning, word by word" (Vol. I, Part 2, canto xiv, p. 227). So it was with Melville all of his life.

Clarel is described by critics as a passive character. According to Geoffrey Stone, he is "rather pale,

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<sup>5</sup>Leon Howard, "Introduction" to Eight American Writers: An Anthology of American Literature, ed. Norman Foerster and Robert J. Falk (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1963), p. 793.

<sup>6</sup>Merlin Bowen, The Long Encounter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 253.

and pale-minded."<sup>7</sup> Yet the role of answer-seeker is an active one. Clarel is passive only in that he finds no answer sufficient to hold him to it, but the particles of belief and disbelief still pull him toward their opposing poles, just as they did his creator, Herman Melville. Clarel, too, had to have an active strength, a rugged constitution, to resist being torn apart by the forces that he gave consideration to before resisting. Those critics, such as Bezanson and Mahoney, who definitely assign one character in the poem as Clarel's chosen mentor, interpret the poem differently from this writer. Melville, to his death, was in the "perpetual process of becoming." He had the strength to resist easy answers, even, finally, hard-to-come-by answers. So it is with Clarel.

When the poem was published in 1876, John Hoadley, who had a profound respect for his brother-in-law Melville, determinedly studied the book. "Clarel is not easy reading," he said.<sup>8</sup> Neither was it easy writing, nor is it easy writing about Clarel. The book is so rich in ideas and characters it is almost impossible to know what to eliminate

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<sup>7</sup>Geoffrey Stone, Melville (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1949), p. 280.

<sup>8</sup>Leyda, Log, p. 751. A continuation of this letter reveals Hoadley's concern for Melville. "But it /Clarel/ will grow on thoughtful reading and will give Herman Melville a firm footing on a higher plane than anything he has before written. I wish it might make him at once rich, famous and happy!--Noble fellow!"

from consideration. All the thoughts of the times received notice by Melville's active intelligence, and all these thoughts are represented, through characters, in Clarel. Characters such as Nathan, the apostate Puritan who became a Jew; Nehemiah, the senile and saintly Evangelist; Djalea the Druze, the wise guide of the pilgrimage; Agath, the timoneer; Salvaterra, the fervent monk; the Dominican, who saw all hope in Rome; Margoth, the satirized scientist, and the banker from Lebanon are only a few of the characters who embody attitudes and beliefs essential to the understanding of the poem. But in order to limit, while exploring, ideas which pertain most closely to the theme of this thesis, four pilgrims have been chosen for particular analysis. They are Derwent, Vine, Mortmain and Clarel.<sup>9</sup> Into the youthful Clarel, in the course of the poem, is compressed Melville's spiritual growth of a lifetime. Derwent, Vine and Mortmain are the most instrumental figures, who, by negative and positive precepts and examples, helped Melville to attain that maturity which recognizes that there can be no end, other than death, to mental and spiritual growth.

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<sup>9</sup>Two other important characters, Celio and Ungar, are given notice within the major character analyses. Rolfe, the pilgrim Bezanson considered to be the "intellectual hero" of the poem, is not discussed except in passing. His is a stunted character portrayal for the most part. (See discussion under Mortmain.)



Derwent

In an early passage introducing Derwent, he is depicted as a priest--"though but in part" (I, 2, 1, 172). In Derwent is combined both the secular and cleric tone.

Tho' English, with an English home,  
His spirits through Creole cross derived  
The light and effervescent foam;  
And youth in years mature survived.  
(Ibid.)

As his character is developed throughout the poem, it becomes obvious that the youthfulness which survives is an immaturity of mind and heart of a kind for which Melville had little sympathy. When Derwent decides to take the young Clarel under his wing and give him fatherly advice, he tells him that he dives too deep and that he should be happy with the surface of life:

This shaft you sink shall strike no bloom:  
The surface, ah, heaven keeps that green;  
Green, sunny: nature's active scene,  
For man appointed, man's true home.  
(II, 3, xxi, 109)

With these remarks, Derwent identifies himself as one totally in opposition to the deep-divers, men who are unafraid of the truth, men whom Melville revered. Melville believed that the vision of life Derwent endorsed was natural only to youth or to men who could not mature.

In the canto, "Tomb and Fountain," Melville shows a fantasy world in which Ruth and Clarel as youths in the early stages of young love can almost "win Eden back." This dream-quality, the budding of Spring in their hearts,

makes "the tales abstruse/ Of Christ, the crucified, Pain's Lord/ Seem foreign--forged--incongruous" (I, 1, xxviii, 110). But the man who matures, as Clarel does in the course of the poem, learns that Christ's pain, as his own, is real, and must be endured.

The Anglican priest Derwent refuses to face the fact of pain. He reacts almost with panic when a discussion descends into a probing analysis of Christ's life and crucifixion, and he constantly attempts to direct the conversation away from religion entirely or to the brighter side of Christ's coming. At one point he declares, "I do avow He still doth seem/ Pontiff of optimists supreme!" (II, 3, vi, 31). Each time Derwent posits such an observation, in opposition to the tenor of the discussion, one pilgrim or another lashes back at him with impatience or disgust at his shallowness. With this particular assertion, it is the old Mortmain who rebukes Derwent:

Leave thy carmine! From thorns the streak  
Ruddies enough that tortured cheek.  
'Twas Shaftesbury first assumed your tone,  
Trying to cheerfulize Christ's moan.  
(II, 3, vi, 31)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>To illustrate how the arguments of doubt and faith move in and out in Clarel, "Christ's moan" (My God, my God, forsakest me?) is the stimulus for the young hunchback Celio to cry out "Upbraider! we upbraid again;/ Thee we upbraid" (I, 1, xiii, 52). Celio, a Catholic who has lost faith, berates Christ for bringing a promise of a mansion in the heaven which has not been kept. "Behold the Man," Celio says, "Who warranted if not began/ The dream that drags out its repulse" (I, 1, xiii, 53). Before this time, he contends

Even the young Clarel, as he goes through the maturing process, becomes anguished sufficiently at Derwent's complacency to counter his assertions. While the pilgrimage is stopped at Mar Saba, Derwent tries to counsel Clarel by telling him that giving himself the goad is "obsolete" and that it is even "indecorous" to imitate Hamlet's sigh and to "brood/ In selfish introverted search" (II, 3, xxi, 108). Clarel, with passionate intensity, stops Derwent's pious moralizing:

Forbear!  
 Ah, wherefore not at once name Job,  
 In whom these Hamlets all conglobed.  
 Own, own with me, and spare to feign,  
 Doubt bleeds, nor Faith is free from pain!  
 (II, 3, xxi, 109)

At another time, Clarel muses about Derwent, "This man--/ May Christian true such temper wish?/ His happiness seems paganish" (II, 3, xxviii, 271). This observation occurs after Derwent expresses his good cheer over conversing with a young Lyonesse. Yet it isn't the conversation that impressed him, but "all the while/ My thoughts were wandering away. . . . Such harmony pervades his warm/ Soft outline" (II, 4, xxvii, 270). The surface of the man is all that Derwent wishes to see. "He is the pleasantest small fellow" (*Ibid.*). Derwent does not wish to know that the young man's happy façade belies his inner turmoil. (The Lyonesse is a

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man was happier and "lived content--/ Content with life's own discontent" (*Ibid.*). On the other hand, Ungar, Mortmain and Rolfe are more champions of Christ and are impassioned against man and his inability to follow Christ's teachings.

Jew trying to "melt in, nor be separate," and he has denied his heritage for "grandsire Abraham" is "out of mode" (II, 3, xxviii, 275-276<sup>7</sup>.) Clarel, in converse with the Lyonese, had had an intuition of the truth: "I mind me of a stir/ Of colour quick" (*Ibid.*, p. 276). But it is Derwent's specialty to consider matters and men superficially. When Derwent criticizes St. Francis because he is unmanly, Rolfe asks him, "Prithee, tell, What is it to be manly?" (II, 4, xiv, 217). Derwent, throwing out his chest, answers it is to be "man-like," "man at his best!" (*Ibid.*). Rolfe has to remind the priest that "Man is that thing of sad renown/ Which moved a deity to come down/ And save him. Lay not too much stress/ Upon the carnal manliness:/ The Christliness is better--higher" (*Ibid.*).

But it is these underlying truths, the invisible truth as Melville terms it, that Derwent wishes to deny. He does not want truly to know his brother; this would engage him in suffering. Because he wants to close out all but the "green" surface, Derwent's happiness, therefore, is not Christian, but "paganish."

Melville, who existed, misunderstood, most of his life in a world peopled with a preponderance of optimistic Derwents, achieved true poetic justice by creating a world in which it is Derwent who is out of place. Of all the pilgrims who begin at Jerusalem and make the round trip back, Derwent is the only optimist. He is, also, the only

one, finally, who has no genuine feeling of love for his fellow man. On the surface he is the most solicitous and amiable of the travelers;<sup>11</sup> yet his is a shallow concern since he wants no part of human suffering. Rolfe, among the pilgrims, has the greatest tolerance for Derwent, so often when Derwent has been squelched by one of the pilgrims he turns to Rolfe for comfort. "A bond we have; We lock" (II, 4, xxiii, 254) he tells Rolfe. Yet when Rolfe almost angrily defends the surly Ungar against Derwent's criticism, Derwent is truly baffled. It is inconceivable to him that Rolfe could think differently from him about the monomaniac's rude conduct. Eventually Derwent arrives at a happy answer: "But, yes, I see:/ Your countryman he is. Well, well,/ That's right--you're right; no more I'll dwell" (II, 4, xxiii, 255). Anxious to keep from himself the real reason Rolfe defends Ungar,<sup>12</sup> Derwent convinces

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<sup>11</sup>It is possible that Melville adapted the Teutonic Derwin, meaning the people's friend, to fit the man who was only superficially a friend. Bezanson speculates that Melville may have chosen Derwent's name because of the river Derwent in England; Richard Harter Fogle thinks there may be an association with Derwent Coleridge, and John Bernstein suggests that the name has a German derivation, therefore, the wind. (German language teachers say this is unlikely.)

<sup>12</sup>Rolfe defends Ungar because he recognizes the truth of his argument, even though that truth is unpleasant. The only restraint of man's instinct "to know, and above all wish to know," according to Unamuno, is to deceive himself and to deceive others to deceive themselves. These self-deceivers are the men Melville declared "would never make it through the Custom house to get into Eternity."

himself that it is Rolfe's chivalry which is the cause. "I like your magnanimity" (II, 4, xxiii, 256), Derwent tells Rolfe. Whatever provides an easy answer that will not upset his "mindless complacency," Derwent embraces. Rolfe, whose tolerance is expansive, suppresses a surprised stare and says nothing. He is not like Derwent who would "Perish truth/ If it but act the boor" (II, 4, xiii, 208), but he will not persist in it just for principle's sake. It is this moral imprecision, this "many-sidedness" of Rolfe's, which keeps Clarel somewhat at distance.

As characterized in Clarel, Derwent is the epitome of Unamuno's definition of those "clever-witted, affectively stupid persons" who say it is pointless to seek answers for the unknown or to "kick against the pricks."<sup>13</sup> Unamuno drew the parallel that "it is as if one should say to a man whose leg has had to be amputated that it does not help him at all to think about it." Derwent would make just such a statement and, in effect, does. Late in the poem, Don Hannibal, a cripple who lost an arm and a leg fighting for Mexican liberty,<sup>4</sup> is introduced. Although he is another monomaniac, a "reformado reformed" who wants no villain to take man's part, "[I] disparage him with all

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<sup>13</sup>The man with the tragic vision, however, must "fight against his destiny, kick against the pricks, and state his case before God or his fellows." (The unfootnoted quotations used in this chapter have been used previously and are footnoted in the chapters in which they originally appear.)

my heart" (II, 4, xix, 472), he has a sense of humor and presents a jolly surface. In the disagreement with Rolfe over Ungar, Derwent points to Don Hannibal as an example of how a man should comport himself in adversity.

Donn Hannibal through storm  
Has passed; yet does his sunshine strike.  
But Ungar, clouded man! No balm  
He'll find in that unhappy vein.  
(II, 4, xxiii, 254)

This is little more than a rephrasing of the old maxim, "Laugh and the world laughs with you; cry and you cry alone." But in the world of the poem that Melville created, the preponderance of persons are those who are not afraid of, and empathize more with, the honest cry. This honest cry acts as a sharp "counter-poise to the exorbitant hopefulness, juvenile and shallow" of the Anglican Derwent, whose religious faith is even suspect. After a discussion dominated by Rolfe concerning various Jews who by their boldness and freethinking "with vigour shook/ Faith's leaning tower" (I, 2, xxii, 258), Clarel excitedly asks "And whose the eye that sees aright,/ If any?" (*Ibid.*, p. 261). Rolfe turns away "as overtasked" by the demand,

But here  
Sedate a kindly tempered look  
Private and confidential spoke  
From Derwent's eyes, Clarel to cheer:  
Take heart; something to fit thy youth  
Instil I may, some saving truth--  
Not best just now to volunteer.  
(*Ibid.*)

But even this early in the poem, Derwent has exposed himself

for what he is. The student dismisses him with contempt:  
 "Thought Clarel: Pray, and what wouldst/ prove?/ Thy faith  
 an over-easy glove" (Ibid.).

### Vine

Many biographers of Melville assume that there was a definite break in the friendship between Hawthorne and Melville and that it was Hawthorne who brought the friendship to a close. Other scholars, more particular to the facts, only see the physical separation as leading to a diminishment of the intensity of friendship. Yet two such careful critics as Walter E. Bezanson and William Sedgwick both see in Clarel the attempt by Melville to assuage his hurt feelings for a rupture in friendship instigated by Hawthorne. "I am convinced that for Vine Melville drew on his impressions, by no means wholly sympathetic now, of Hawthorne," Sedgwick wrote.<sup>14</sup> Bezanson devoted fifteen pages of his thesis to document his assertion that Clarel's deciding in favor of Rolfe over Vine in a considered evaluation of the two men's merits was Melville's way of settling accounts with Hawthorne for rejecting him.<sup>15</sup> Although Melville neither "expected nor desired that the identification should be made," Bezanson believes that Melville did specifically create Vine as the figure of Hawthorne and Rolfe

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<sup>14</sup>Sedgwick, Tragedy of Mind, p. 206.

<sup>15</sup>Bezanson, "Herman Melville's Clarel," pp. 163-165.



as a portrait of himself at the age of development he was in when he first met Hawthorne.<sup>16</sup>

Bezanson labels Vine's "lack of hearty sociability, his anti-intellectualism, his protective fear, his annoying pride" as criticisms Melville made against Vine--and, thereby, Hawthorne. But in or out of the poem, these characteristics, either in Vine or Hawthorne, are not negatively conceived. Melville provides the acts which Bezanson labels as defects of character, but in proper context it is unbelievable that Melville intended criticism. As a case in point, Bezanson refers to an instance in the poem when Vine "in mere caprice of clay,/ Or else because a pride had birth/ Slighting high claims which vaunted be/ And favouring things of low degree--/ From heaven he turned him down to earth,/ Eagle to ass" (II, 3, viii, 36). Vine has turned his gaze from an eagle that has flown into the air to the lowly ass that Nehemiah rides. Bezanson interprets the scene as follows:

To Vine the ass is a symbol of realism. He offers to wait upon the humble beast (Clarel, I, p. 231) and is delighted, later, to see it leading the procession. (Clarel, II, p. 36 f). In developing this symbol Melville is evidently pursuing a hated ghost, for when Vine capriciously discloses a philosophic preference for the ass over the eagle he is

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 164. This assessment of Rolfe as a youthful Melville is much more acceptable than the usual interpretation that Rolfe is a total "self-portrait," romantically or ideally conceived. The defects in Rolfe's character are those that Melville would denigrate, not uphold, in a man of his years.

striking against one of Melville's deepest symbols--against the idea of tragic heroism. (See the passage on the "Catskill eagle" in Moby-Dick, Works, VIII, p. 182.)<sup>17</sup>

In the context of the poem, the ass provides transportation for the saintly Nehemiah, for whom Vine feels a protective concern. The ass hee-haws just when Margoth, the scientist, holds forth in bombast; Vine appreciates the timing. Often he helps Nehemiah by carrying food to the ass. Before the incident Bezanson refers to there is a history of affection felt for the lowly ass by Vine. Then the eagle, which Bezanson refers to as symbolic of tragic heroism as established by Melville in Moby-Dick, happens to be a gier-eagle, a vulture. It is flying high because it has been frightened away from the dead carcass of a camel it has been eating. Melville would hardly be critical of Vine for having a pride in preferring the ass in this instance to the vulture. Even without the negative concept in this case, Melville himself had the same pride in championing the weak or lowly. He was the one who wrote Hawthorne that he thought a thief in jail was as honorable a person as Gen. George Washington. Melville, too, would take pride, in all the affirmative meaning of the word, in "slighting high claims" and "favouring things of low degree" if he knew, as Vine did, from what source came the energy for the gier-eagle to achieve his height in flight.

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<sup>17</sup>Bezanson, "Herman Melville's Clarel," pp. 194-195.

As to Vine's "lack of hearty sociability," he reacts more keenly than any other of the pilgrims to that which goes on around him; he is truly observant and sympathetic. Although he does not always interfere or offer consolation, his heart responds to most situations--his eyes or his actions reveal an understanding or an empathy. Before Clarel and Vine have ever met, they both witness a scene of Nehemiah bathing his eyes in the pool as Jesus had bathed the eyes of the blind. Vine and Clarel "exchanged quick sympathies/ Though but in glance, moved by that act/ Of one whose faith transfigured fact./ A bond seemed made between them there" (I, 1, xxviii, 114). There are many such instances in the poem when Vine and others--guards as well as actual pilgrims--share wordlessly a feeling of human brotherhood. Vine is a character created by Melville, not Derwent; Vine is not a glad-hander. Those aspects of Vine's behavior Bezanson terms "sins" are in fact Melvillean virtues. Even after Vine's silent rebuke to Clarel, his eyes reveal his sorrow in having to disappoint the young boy. (This crucial episode is treated in detail in the section on Clarel.) And Vine's later treatment of Clarel shows no hostility, no grudge held; in fact, Vine treats Clarel with more of a comradely spirit than he does anyone else. Clarel had sought a union that Vine knew could not give him the communion he desired--no earthly alliance could. This is one of the lessons that Clarel had

to learn. Vine, the older man, serves in this instance as teacher. He is but one of the agents whereby Clarel gains wisdom. Melville championed the truth of Solomon's adage that "he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (Ecclesiastes 1:18). He does not imply any more criticism of Vine in this instance than he does of Agath, the timoneer, who turns away from Derwent when he calls "Luck to thee!" (IV, 4, xiii, 206).

No slight he means--'tis far from that;  
But, schooled by the inhuman sea,  
He feels 'tis vain, to wave the hat,  
In God-speed on this mortal strand.  
(Ibid.)

Vine, too, has been "schooled"--he is a seasoned man who has already travelled the road Clarel is taking. Even though Clarel might think Vine can answer the needs of his soul, Vine knows that he cannot.

Derwent would respond with pleasant-sounding, empty phrases that would, in fact, be far more cruel to a person of Clarel's intensity than Vine's kindly meant silent rebuff. The important major characters in the pilgrimage are those persons who cut through all the superficial formalities, the trivial inanities, and go directly to what they want to say.

Anti-intellectualism is another demerit Bezanson holds up against Vine. Vine is anti-intellectual because he does not take part in the discussions that the other pilgrims hold and Rolfe usually conducts. Yet his abstention

is hardly anti-intellectual; it represents almost an arrogant intellectuality. He has gone far beyond the others in thought and has considered all the sides of the arguments they pursue, and he is bored. "But, in the main, how ill he brooked/ That weary length of arguing" (II, 3, v, 25). His piling up of stones, "a monument to barrenness" (II, 3, vii, 35), gives him something to do to occupy himself while the others are traveling roads of thought he has already traversed. Vine never misses any comment, however, that has an original theme. Certainly the old roads are "dismal and monotonous," yet Vine is on the pilgrimage, too. And he is not totally silent; he speaks at length when he has an important observation to make. But for the most part, he derives some fellowship just listening in. When he does find himself separated from the others, he wonders "And is it I/ (He muses), I that leave the others,/ Or do they leave me?" (IV, 3, xxvii, 126). This is always the concern of a person who thinks he chooses to be left alone and then is. Vine tells himself that he loves only the past and that the present is "plebeian," yet he is the most responsive person on the trip to the actualities of the present, the moods, feelings, activities of the other pilgrims. Vine chose to make the trip; no one forced him to go along. He thinks he wants to be alone but he truly wants to be alone only so long as there are people around to keep him company. Such a characterization of Vine is not

a criticism but an insight into him.<sup>18</sup> Even in those years when Hawthorne was a recluse in Salem, he was surrounded by family. And though shy, though withdrawn, he was not ignorant of the feelings and thoughts of others. Both Hawthorne's wife, Sophie, and his son, Julian, have remarked about this quality in him of natural attraction. In a letter to her mother, Mrs. Hawthorne disclosed this aspect of her husband when she wrote about a visit paid to her husband by Herman Melville.

Nothing pleases me better than to sit & hear this growing man /Melville/ dash his tumultuous waves of thought up against Mr. Hawthorne's great, genial, comprehending silences--out of the profound of which a wonderful smile, or one powerful word sends back the foam & fury into a peaceful booming, calm--or perchance not into a calm--but a murmuring expostulation--for there is never a "mush of concession" in him. Yet such a love & reverence & admiration for Mr. Hawthorne as is really beautiful to witness--& without doing anything on his own part, except merely being, it is astonishing how people make him their innermost Father Confessor.<sup>19</sup>

Yet with Melville's sensitivity of reaction, it is certain that he would not "pour out his soul" to Hawthorne without, after a while, beginning to recognize that it was a one-way outpouring. Should Hawthorne even unconsciously reveal that he was not profiting from the friendship as much as Melville, Melville would be prompt to sense this. He came to Hawthorne, in the first place, apologetically; he had an

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<sup>18</sup>This intuitive knowledge Melville had of Hawthorne has been borne out by subsequent biographies.

<sup>19</sup>Metcalf, Cycle and Epicycle, p. 106.

extremely exalted impression of the older man. Often in Melville's letters to Hawthorne, Melville qualifies or amends his remarks in an effort to be continually honest with himself, for he recognized in Hawthorne a man who was sensitive to, and worthy of, a deep honesty. Probably the chief idealized portrait drawn by Herman Melville in his lifetime was that of Nathaniel Hawthorne as Nathaniel Hawthorne. Because he admired Hawthorne so much, he always tried to bring himself up to measure before the man. Such incentive made by friendship for self-improvement is one of the classic attributes of the Platonic relationship. Since truth was such a fluctuating fellow to Melville, he did not always perceive an encroaching discrepancy in his thinking until he had a thought on paper, and when he saw it in imagination being filtered through the fine web of Hawthorne's mind. In one such letter, probably reacting to an imagined vision of Hawthorne smiling to himself over this upstart Melville taking God to task while all the time dutifully capitalizing the pronouns, Melville added the admission "(You perceive I employ a capital initial in the pronoun referring to the Deity; don't you think there is a slight dash of flunkeyism in that usage.)"<sup>20</sup>

W. H. Auden in his poem, "Herman Melville," wrote "Nathaniel had been shy because his love was selfish."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Davis and Gilman, Letters, p. 129.

<sup>21</sup>W. H. Auden, "Herman Melville," The Southern Review, V (Autumn, 1939), 367-368. (See Appendix B, p. 166.)

It is doubtful that Melville ever interpreted Hawthorne's love as such. Nothing in the future relationship of the two men, after the Berkshire years, suggests any rupture. Hawthorne was dogged by pennies, too, and he could better provide for his family by moving away from the country. Eventually he went overseas. With an ocean separating them, naturally the intensity of the friendship gradually diminished, yet each man kept an active interest in the other's affairs. Melville visited Hawthorne both on his way to the Holy Land and on his return trip. And when Hawthorne died in 1864, Melville wrote "Monody" in tribute to him:

To have known him, to have loved him  
     After loneliness long;  
 And then to be estranged in life,  
     And neither in the wrong;  
 And now for death to set his seal--  
     Ease me, a little ease, my song!

By wintry hills his hermit-mound  
     The sheeted snow-drifts drape,  
 And houseless there the snow-bird flits  
     Beneath the fir-trees' crape:  
 Glazed now with ice the cloistral vine  
     That hid the shyest grape.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Howard P. Vincent (ed.), Collected Poems of Herman Melville (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1947), pp. 228-229.

Hawthorne died May 18, 1864, and a member of the funeral party wrote in his diary that the weather was warm and birds were singing. Because of the second verse, as well as other reasons, Harrison Hayford questions whether this poem was written about Hawthorne. Jay Leyda in his Log has the first paragraph assigned to Hawthorne's death date, but the second paragraph to a later period. Vincent wrote in Collected Poems that "the allusion to the vine in the closing lines of this poem indicates that the poem is addressed to



Perhaps though when Bezanson states that Melville is critical of Vine because of his "protective fear" he is the most unjust to Melville. The incident in which Vine reveals his fearfulness in Clarel is one in which he moves apart from the other pilgrims. Mortmain has just reminded Derwent of Christ's cry upon the cross, and then Vine retreats from the group. When Clarel comes upon Vine, unseen by him, Vine's face reveals an anguish and ripeness in fear (II, 3, vii, 33-34). Clarel is quite shaken by the incident and he realizes that he must give up any hope of coming at Vine's secret or winning him. Although Bezanson equates this discovery of Clarel's as an indication of a secret weakness and fear Melville divined in Hawthorne, the facts of the poem do not bear out the assumption that Melville was critical of this behavior. Julian Hawthorne said that Melville told him, after Hawthorne's death, that he thought Hawthorne had always lived with a secret that he never divulged, but this was a conjecture not a criticism. From all indications, Herman Melville had several secrets of his own. And he certainly had the fear of death, which

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the memory of Nathaniel Hawthorne." Ibid., p. 474.

As early as February, 1851, Melville used the vine image in relation to Hawthorne. In a letter to Duyckinck he wrote, "I think they /'Twice-Told Tales' far exceed the 'Mosses'--they are, I fancy, an earlier vintage from his vine." Davis and Gilman, Letters, p. 121. Then in July, 1852, Melville in a letter to Hawthorne wrote, "Do send me . . . a vine from the curly arbor of Master Julian." Ibid., p. 153.

is the fear Vine's face shows when Clarel happens on him.

All of the pilgrims fear death, but none is quite as open in displaying this fear as is the "banker of the rich Levant." When Glaucon mentions the word "death," the banker pleads "Have done,/ I beg! Unless all joy you'd cripple,/ Both noun omit and participle" (I, 2, iii, 182). Later he implores that no one mention again "that ill word/ Whose first is D and last is H" (Ibid.). Bezanson in his thesis calls attention to Nehemiah's fear and he draws the parallel to Vine's fear.

Once, in an incident not unlike Clarel's discovery of "that nameless look" on the face of Vine, the young student sees on the sleeping face of Nehemiah an expression which terrorizes him; of this look Melville says only, "Be it sealed." The implication is, possibly, that within the trusting heart there is fear.<sup>23</sup>

Although he calls himself the "chief of sinners," Nehemiah is characterized as a harmless, kindly, nearly senile Evangelist who is relatively sinless. Nehemiah's fear is not considered a weakness, and Clarel is not less interested in the elderly man. Nehemiah in spite of his simplicity is looked up to, "For, say what cynic will or can,/ Man sinless is revered by man/ Through all the forms which creed can lend" (I, 1, viii, 30). Clarel is young and is searching an idol, so that when Vine, a man he has idolized, shows himself to have an ordinary man's weakness, then Clarel is dismayed. But as Clarel matures throughout

<sup>23</sup>Bezanson, "Herman Melville's Clarel," p. 269.

the poem, he begins to understand that fear is the human condition when man's existence is faced in honesty. For men like Vine, Mortmain, and Ungar particularly, mention of Christ's suffering is a direct reminder of their own perilous condition, for Christ's life is testimony to the suffering involved by existence. To them, He is not the "pontif of optimists supreme" but the Man of Sorrows.

Even Agath, who has been beaten into submission by a life filled with tortures, shows cowardly fear at the sight of a death-dealing scorpion. "Quiet Agath, with a start . . ./ Shrieked out, abhorrent or in fright" (II, 4, iv, 173). Mortmain, in his sleep, gnaws on his hand, from fear of death. Rolfe tells of sailors who risk their lives tending the spar during electric storms being frightened by spiders. Then when Rolfe disclaims on the certainty of death coming to all men, Derwent quickly tries to change the subject (I, 2, xvi, 236). Vine is the one to revive it: "As embers, not yet cold, will catch; Quick at the touch of smallest match" (Ibid.). Although Vine does have a fear, a secret weakness, he is not as chary of the painful subject of death as are many of the pilgrims. And as Melville wrote about Daniel Orme, "Even admitting that there was something dark that he chose to keep to himself, what then? Such reticence may sometimes be more for the sake of others than one's self?" (Works, Vol. XIII, p. 122). This seems to be a direct message of Clarel in regard to the fear of

Vine. He is a sensitive man, accessible to mankind through a quiet and quick empathy to their sufferings, and he is a tormented man himself. The dignity he evinces through containment of his torment, his "control of Self," sets him above the others. Rolfe remarks that the pilgrims must see "Vine for some lord who fain would go/ For delicate cause, incognito" (I, 2, x, 210). Clarel notices Djalea's deference to Vine and he wonders "Why this preferring way toward one?" (Ibid.). The worthy members of the pilgrimage admire and respect Vine more than they do any other person. And Melville does give Vine top position on the Bethel stair at Mar Saba. (This incident is elaborated on under Mortmain.)

Assuming that Melville meant Vine to be patterned after his friend, Nathaniel Hawthorne, from the character portrayal of Vine in Clarel it is quite evident that Melville returned the compliment to Hawthorne that Hawthorne had paid him: "He has a very high and noble nature, and better worth immortality than most of us."

#### Mortmain

"Some unrenderable thing" which has wrung his heart and is as "deep as nature's mine" has formed the character and disposition of Mortmain, Melville's key monomaniac. Mortmain is not the only monomaniac of impressive stature in Clarel; he is one in a series, yet there is in

his characterization greater evidence of sympathy and love than there is in the monomaniac, Celio, who precedes him, and in Ungar, who follows him. (Numerous other monomaniacs appear briefly in the poem, providing capsule commentaries or embellishments on themes Melville considers important: e.g. Agath, the timoneer beaten into submission; the Elder, Calvinist representative of the "irritable orthodox"; Don Hannibal, the "reformatado reformed.")

Mortmain is a bastard, "illicit son of noble lady," whose Swedish mother hated him and whose father provided him with little more than "liberal lore and timely income." While young, Mortmain went alone to Paris where he became active in revolutionary philanthropic causes. His mission was to eradicate the evil in the world. Accepting the thesis that evil was the absence of good, he set about to create that "uncreated Good." Mortmain preached peace and good will, and "he expounded it so well,/ Disciples came" (I, 2, iv, 188). But to his considerable dismay, he discovered that those of sincere and superior mind who answered the appeal, clasped hands and took the "oath of aim" were greatly outnumbered by blind, worthless fools and traitors who, only seeking self-gain, also took the oath.

Experience eventually taught Mortmain that those who "makest such hot haste" forging the future would do considerably less harm if they would turn their time to studying the past.

Wouldst meddle with the state? Well, mount  
 Thy guns; how many men dost count?  
 Besides, there's more that here belongs:  
 Be many questionable wrongs:  
 By yet more questionable war,  
 Prophet of peace, these wouldst thou bar?  
 The world's not new, nor new thy plea.  
 Tho' even shouldst thou triumph, see,  
 Prose overtakes the victor's songs:  
 Victorious right may need redress:  
 No failure like a harsh success.  
 Yea, ponder well the historic page:  
 Of all who, fired with noble rage,  
 Have warred for right without reprieve,  
 How many spanned the wings immense  
 Of Satan's muster, or could cheat  
 His cunning tactics of retreat  
 And ambuscade?

(I, 2, iv, 189)

Mortmain came to the recognition that the good and wise men, with their small patch of space, could do little against "the rest"--malice which "divides with ignorance." He believed nothing to be stable, and that all was "lackey to the moon/ Of fate." Mortmain, therefore, tried to turn himself from concerns of the world to that which "Behind all this still works some power/ Unknowable, thou'lt yet adore./ That steers the world, not man" (p. 190). A wanderer of the gray places of the earth, Mortmain as "oblivion's volunteer" labors to achieve distance from his humanitarian concerns, and "In the dust/ Of wisdom" to sit down, "and rust" (Ibid.).

It is at this point in his career at which Mortmain is picked up in the poem, and it is immediately apparent that try as he will, he cannot achieve "distance." He is raw from the open wounds of suffering. Although he says

that "Man's vicious: snaffle him with kings;/ Or, if kings cease to curb, devise/ Severer bit" (I, 2, iii, 186), he suffers, as did Christ, over man's unenviable state. The appeal of Christianity, that which keeps it alive, Mortmain knows, is the fact that on earth "Man is not happy, nor can be" (p. 185). Although he is made heartsick by the weakness and sinfulness of mankind, he at the same time empathizes with an honest weakness. Derwent's admonition to him, "Thou'rt strong; yield then the weak some room" (p. 186), is spoken from a self-assigned position of superiority by a man who thinks he is strong but is actually a coward, to a man who knows he is weak, but seeks constantly and courageously for strength. It is Derwent's hypocrisy that makes Mortmain rage. When Mortmain leaves the party for a night's vigil alone at Quarantania (the scene of Christ's temptation), the pilgrims fear that he may be killed by the marauders who frequent the area. Djalea, the wise guide for the party, calmly accepts Mortmain's need. "Well, let be. Why chafe?/ Nights are mild; one's pretty safe/ When fearless" (I, 2, xv, 232).

The next day the pilgrims find evidence of Mortmain's vigil by a cross he has left and by the chalked message, "By one who wails the loss,/ This altar to the Slanting Cross (I, 2, xxxi, 301).<sup>24</sup> Later when Mortmain rejoins

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<sup>24</sup>Margoth, the geologist, scrawls below Mortmain's lines, "I, Science, I whose gain's thy loss, I slanted thee, thou Slanting Cross" (p. 304). But in this instance, nature

the party at the banks of the Dead Sea, he remains withdrawn, "Condensed in self, or like a seer/ Unconscious of each object near,/ While yet, informed, the nerve may reach/ Like wire under wave to furthest beach" (I, 2, xxxiv, 313). Then like one possessed, Mortmain jumps up and cries out "Repent! repent in every land/ Or hell's hot kingdom is at hand!" (p. 314). He rushes down to the beach to drink a handful of the "Sodom waters dead." Although Djalea has a Bethlehemite warn him by reciting the legend that anyone who drinks the water will never lose the after-taste, Mortmain "undeterred" drinks the gall.<sup>25</sup> It is the "bitter drink/ They gave to Christ upon the Tree" (p. 313), and Mortmain does not want to protect himself from the bitter experience that Christ was forced to endure.

In the canto, "Sodom," Mortmain, meditating on the star Wormwood, indulges in a recital of the sins that

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is not "indifferent," and "sun and rain, and wind with grit/ Driving, these haste to cancel it." To Melville, science is immaterial in the argument between doubt and faith. "Science the feud can only aggravate"; it solves nothing. Margoth, as a personage the pilgrims encounter, is characterized as an obnoxious fool; he has no redeeming qualities. Even the ass hee-haws when he makes a pronouncement.

<sup>25</sup>Melville in his journal mentions the bitter taste of the water. "Smarting bitter of the water,--carried the bitter in my mouth all day--bitterness of life--thought of all bitter things--Bitter is it to be poor & bitter, to be reviled, & Oh bitter are these waters of Death, thought I." In a marginal notation Melville added "Rainbow over Dead Sea--heaven, after all, has no malice against it." Journal of a Visit, p. 136.



brought down God's wrath. As in the Inferno, Dante's sinners writhe in bubbling liquids of horrid odor, so in Mortmain's mind do the sinners moan--"expelled, transmuted souls/ Blown in these airs, or whirled in shoals; Of gurgles which your gasps send up,/ Or on this crater marge and cup?/ Slavered in slime, or puffed in stench" (p. 319). Mortmain, too, believes that it was not just "carnal harlotry" but the "sins refined, crimes of the spirit," that brought down destruction.

'Tis thou who servedst Mammon's hate  
 Or greed through forms which holy are--  
 Black slaver steering by a star,  
 Tis thou--and all like thee in state.  
 Who knew the world, yet varnished it;  
 Who traded on the coast of crime  
 Thou landing not; who did outwit  
 Justice, his brother, and the time--  
 These, chiefly these, to doom submit.  
 (p. 320)

In Dante's vision, those sinners who are traitors receive the greatest punishment in hell. As Judas was the archfiend in Mortmain's estimation, so was he one of the three foremost sinners in Dante's mind.

Although Mortmain is Melville's most memorable character in Clarel, he is the pilgrim most brutally unreceptive to fellowship.<sup>26</sup> Few of the travelers make any attempt to

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<sup>26</sup>The most unpleasant character, a Scotch Presbyterian Elder who is continually in "smouldering ire," turns back to Jerusalem almost immediately. Rolfe attributes his leaving the group to his inability to get a reaction out of the desert: "He can't provoke a quarrel here/ With blank indifference so drear" (I, 2, x, 211).

Ungar, who vies with Mortmain for designation of the bitterest monomaniac in the poem, has some quality that

understand him, and those who do are rebuffed by him. Even Rolfe, who with finesse and feeling plays the role of peace-maker and is quick to intercept and relieve situations that become explosive from personality clashes, has no true understanding of Mortmain. Clarel is intrigued, but also mystified, by him.

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makes him more appealing to his fellow pilgrims. Although Ungar does not join the group until after they leave Mar Saba and Mortmain is dead, he dominates the sections of the poem in which he appears. Ungar has no sense of humor and he explodes vehemently against Derwent's superficial utterances. In Ungar, one finds Melville's strongest expression of dissatisfaction with democracy. A descendant of one of Calvert's original settlers who married an Indian maiden, Ungar is part Indian and is "sprung from Romish race." A Southerner who objected to slavery but who had to take arms in the Civil War, he is almost pathologically belligerent upon mention of that strife. Yet his bitterest tirades are against a belief in the New World's progress. Democracy to him is but an "arch-strumpet," a "Harlot on horseback, riding down/ The very Ephesians who acclaim/ This great Diana of ill fame" (II, 4, xix, 238). With a belief in the "right divine of Might," the freemen forego all recognition of evil: "supercilious skim/ With spurious wing of seraphim/ The last abyss" (II, 4, xx, 245). Poverty Ungar sees as collaterals of Mammon's overplus, and where once paupers were "professed by saints, by sages prized," and comforted by Christ, now they are "bastardised." Ungar argues that the maxim, "As cruel as a Turk," was contributed by Anglo-Saxons who are far more cruel with their mills which crucify and their wars which turn brother against brother. He is confident that the "myriads playing pygmy parts" will only "yield to one and all/ New confirmation of the fall/ Of Adam" (II, 4, xxi, 250).

Though Ungar provides a fascinating character to study, for the purpose of this thesis his main relevance is in his idea that "prior love must steep the spirit" before men can feel or comprehend Christ as the Son of God. Ungar believes that there are many "Calvary faces" belonging to persons who suffer as did Christ but who have not the assurance of salvation that Christ had. This ties in with the Calvinist doctrine that man can seek faith but he cannot receive it without God's grace--the "prior love." Ungar also believes that it is only "penalty which makes sinners start" (II, 4, xviii, 235). Melville in a book he gave to

In the scene in which Mortmain last appears, he is spoken of as one of "the brotherless." Because Mortmain is presented as one who is so isolated, so immersed in otherwordly concerns, and so antagonistic to human intercourse, he is considered "mad" by the pilgrims. He is also considered to be mad by many of the critics of Clarel. Few critics interpret Mortmain's death as anything but self-willed annihilation.<sup>27</sup> At the same time that they analyze Mortmain's death as suicide, though, they have to ignore the most crucial statement of the poem. They dismiss the hierarchy involved in the placement of the three pilgrims as they view the Mar Saba palm from the Bethel stairway as lacking in "dramatic inevitability" and therefore too ambiguous in meaning to allow for analysis.<sup>28</sup>

The lone Mar Saba palm stands as a symbol of immortality.<sup>29</sup> Since immortality is a constant concern of

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his brother Allan checkmarked with three vertical lines a passage that reads, "None ever repent and believe the gospel, unless their minds are drawn intensely towards their personal and everlasting concerns." A History of the County of Berkshire, Massachusetts by Gentlemen In The County, Clergymen and Laymen (Pittsfield: Printed by Samuel W. Bush, 1829), p. 162.

<sup>27</sup>See John Bernstein, Pacifism and Rebellion in the Writings of Herman Melville (The Hague: Mouton, 1964), p. 196; and Bezanson, "Herman Melville's Clarel," p. 237.

<sup>28</sup>Robert Joslin Packard, "A Study of Herman Melville's Clarel," Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1963 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1965).

<sup>29</sup>See Bowen, The Long Encounter, p. 266; and Mother M. Denis Mahoney, abstract of "Clarel: An Investigation of Spiritual Crisis" (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958), p. 9.

Melville's, it is certain that his selection and placement of the three pilgrims who confront this palm cannot be lacking in significance. Three cantos dealing with this confrontation are entitled "Vine and the Palm," "Mortmain and the Palm," and "Rolfe and the Palm." Clarel is not placed in such a relation to the palm for he has not achieved his full spiritual growth at this time. Derwent figures in a canto in series with the other three but his episode is entitled, "Derwent and the Lesbian." It is apparent that Derwent didn't make it through Melville's Custom House to get into Eternity.

In the canto featuring Mortmain before the palm, there is a considerable change in the Swede. Mortmain sits across from the palm, meditating on Christ's crucifixion and the taunts of the spectators, "Thyself, Thou canst not save" (II, 3, xxviii, 135). At first Mortmain tells himself that he can find no hope in His tree, that it only makes him a misanthrope, but then he amends his thought.

Makes? nay, but 'twould, did not the hate  
Dissolve in pity of the fate.--  
This legend, dream, and fact of life!  
The drooping hands, the dancing feet  
Which in the endless series meet;  
And rumours of No God so rife!  
(Ibid., p. 135)

Mortmain looks down upon his hand, gnawed in his dream, and muses on death. He accepts that it is "death," not despair, that provoked the "testimony of the hand." Mortmain wonders if death means "the sea-beat gains the shore;/ He's home;

his watch is called no more" (Ibid., p. 136), but he is not certain yet, "so looks it." The bitterness of Mortmain is gone; he talks intimately to Death, telling Death that "Not I tax thee" with the role of "dangerous dissembler" who "hoardest strange surprises" for those "whose evil is profound/ In multiform of life's disguises" (Ibid., p. 136). He neither fears punishment for himself nor taxes Death to punish men who "in his license thinks no bound." This manifestation of forgiveness in Mortmain is similar to that of Christ upon the cross. Prior to Mortmain's vigil at Quarantania, his drinking the bitter water of the Dead Sea, and his confrontation with the palm tree, he had shown little tendency toward leniency for himself or for others. But in the tree he finds an "Envoy, whose looks the pang assuage," and he requests that it "Disclose thy heavenly embassy!" (Ibid., p. 137). When the palm tree sways toward Mortmain, he utters disbelief; he is abject with humility: "And sway'st thou over here toward me--/ Toward me can such a symbol sway!" (Ibid., p. 137).

The remainder of the canto reveals Mortmain's appealing to the tree for protection, and it implies his subsequent passing into death. In a trance, Mortmain "soon in such a dream was thrown,/ He felt as floated up in cheer/ Of saint borne heavenward from the bier" (Ibid., p. 137). When Mortmain's body is discovered, he has his "filmed orbs fixed upon the Tree," and "On those thin lips a feather

lies--/ An eagle's wafted from the skies" (II, 3, xxxii, 151). The narrative voice questions if the eagle's feather implies

the vow: and had the genius heard,  
Benignant? nor had made delay,  
But, more than taking him at word,  
Quick wafted where the palm-boughs sway  
In Saint John's heaven?

(Ibid.)

It seems that the answer Melville intended to this question is yes: Mortmain through suffering did gain saving grace. Richard Harter Fogle believes Mortmain is visited "by the mercy of heaven" and knows faith before he dies. Whereas Bezanson compares the eagle's snatching of Mortmain's black skull cap as an evil omen, Fogle believes "the eagle is an agent of God, who has laid Mortmain open to final mercy."<sup>30</sup> Mother Mahoney asserts that Mortmain is the only one of the pilgrims Melville believed had the depth to understand the human experience. She writes, "Mortmain's is the eye that sees aright, and his vision beneath the mystic palm is the answer to what man may know."<sup>31</sup> This statement, plus Mother Mahoney's belief that Clarel accepts Mortmain as his spiritual mentor, seems to be somewhat in excess of Melville's intention. It is more probable that Melville developed his mature thesis that man

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<sup>30</sup>Richard Harter Fogle, "Melville's Clarel: Doubt and Belief," Tulane Studies in English, X (1960), 112.

<sup>31</sup>Mahoney, "Clarel," p. 18.

finally had to depend upon himself. No other person could provide man with the answers he sought.

There is little further conjecture by the pilgrims about Mortmain's death, except that "long he had been undermined in frame" (II, 3, xxxii, 151). Yet earlier two spirits had hovered about Mortmain when he was musing on the evil of the Sodomites and one spirit had inquired of the other if Mortmain could know "those deeps he knows" if he were sinless. His fellow spirit replies to him that Mortmain's ways are not the way sin acts, but that

Sin shuns that way;  
Sin acts the sin, but flees the thought  
That sweeps the abyss that sin has wrought.  
Innocent be the heart and true--  
Howe'er it feed on bitter bread--  
That, venturous through the Evil led.  
Move as along the ocean's bed  
Amid the dragon's staring crew.

(I, 2, xxxvi, 321)

Melville's love and concern for the deep-divers, men of the monomaniac temperament, was more than one of literary interest only. In his writings, Melville's favorites are the "devotees," men as defined by Richard Harter Fogle "who have been tried and almost broken, who have learned to accept the burden of life with patience, humility, and--in some fortunate cases--faith."<sup>32</sup> But Melville was also concerned with the fate awaiting actual men who had suffered in their earthly life, and who did not necessarily suffer

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<sup>32</sup>Richard Harter Fogle, "The Themes of Melville's Later Poetry," Tulane Studies in English, II (1961), 66.

in silence: those "shrieking fanatics" who kicked against the pricks and laid their case before God and man. In the first few pages of Clarel, Melville compares Celio, his fictional creation, with Leopardi who had been "stoned by Grief" (I, 1, xiv, 55). Celio is the hunchback who appears briefly, dies, and is replaced by Mortmain. Celio and Mortmain are brothers in grief, as Leopardi and Obermann are considered by Melville to be related through grief. Again in the second volume of Clarel, Melville brings up Obermann and Leopardi

Do seraphim shed balm  
At last on all of earnest mind,  
Unworldly yearners, nor the palm  
Awarded St. Theresa, ban  
To Leopardi, Obermann?

(II, 3, i, 3)

Melville, in the real world, could only posit a hope that the immortal leaf would be awarded to such men as Thomson, Leopardi, Hawthorne, himself; he had no certainty. If he were God, he would deprive no man of it. (Even for Derwent, he would turn his back and leave the gate slightly ajar.) He was in empathetic accord with those who suffered anguish, for those who longed for immortality, and for those who had no assurance they would be granted it. If Melville were God--but he was not God, he was only the creator of Clarel. As the creator of the poem, he could award the palm to all. And he could even forego momentarily his "ruthless" democracy and acknowledge, as he had to Hawthorne



in the first years of their acquaintance, an "aristocracy" of "superior" fellows. To Vine, as friend, mentor, and one who achieved nobility through his silent suffering, he could award the highest rung on the ladder to his paradise. To Mortmain as representative of all the shrieking fanatics, the men who wore the "Calvary faces" but who had not the assurance of Christ, he could give a choice location on the steps. Rolfe he placed on a lower rung. With Rolfe, Melville had a great problem; he had to keep him as a youthful aspect of himself. In stunting his growth, so to speak, he had a character impossible to manage. Rolfe was not schooled by the inhuman sea, yet he was familiar with it. It is only because Rolfe is a part of Melville, the Melville who will be schooled and become wise (for at heart Melville is a monomaniac too), that Rolfe appears with Vine and Mortmain on the Bethel stairs in a privileged position. To accept his presence there, one has to know that he is but a stand-in for Clarel.

### Clarel

On the second Sunday after Christmas, a young divinity student sits beside his unpacked luggage in a Jerusalem inn. He has dropped out of school and has come to the Holy Land to see if at the birthplace of Christianity he can find the means for resurrecting his flagging faith. He is well educated in book knowledge but knows little of

life. "The books, the books not all have told" (I, 1, i, 5). There is a pestering loneliness in Clarel that sends him out into the streets and into the shops in search of anyone with whom he might converse. He is anxious to have his fear erased that Palestine is a sterile wasteland and the last place in the world that he should have come to in search of religious comfort.

As he moves in and out of the historic places, encountering guides, guards, friars, pilgrims, peasants, matrons and souvenir hawkers, Clarel's mind seethes with conflicting doubt and belief in the Christ story. His separateness from those with whom he mingles is clear to him.

For how might break  
Upon those simple natures true,  
The complex passion? might they view  
The apprehension tempest-tossed  
The spirit in gulf of dizzying fable lost?  
(I, 1, v, 28)

Outside the city walls near the Jaffa Gate, Clarel reminds himself that it was near here that the stranger ("the Arisen, then unknown") had walked from Emmaus with two of faltering heart and had rekindled their faith. In almost a superstitious pact-making, Clarel decides that if some stranger were to accost him with questions that would "expound and prove" and make his heart burn with love, then he would believe that Emmaus were no dream. By chance, just then a senile Evangelist notices Clarel and inquires of him

why he is alone without a guide. He offers to Clarel the book he carries for use as his guide; it is the Bible. From this accidental encounter, Clarel and the Evangelist Nehemiah become companions. Nehemiah, who believes that as soon as Zion is restored and the Jew is converted Christ will return, wanders about the city dispensing tracts. His only food is bread and water that is brought to him daily by a beautiful young girl, Ruth.<sup>33</sup> Through Nehemiah, by whom the lonely student is conducted on daily tours about the city, Clarel meets Ruth and her parents, Agar and Nathan. Nathan is a converted Jew, a former American Puritan, who spends most of the week farming an arid plot outside of Jerusalem. Because of the danger from marauding Arabs, he has his Jewish wife and daughter remain in the city. Agar, who is lonely for the green countryside of America and the friends whom she left when she had to accompany her husband to Palestine, feels a kindling of maternal interest in the orphan Clarel. Also, she welcomes and encourages the love that begins to grow between him and Ruth. The mother hopes that through their marriage, her daughter

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<sup>33</sup>Richard Chase in his biography of Herman Melville said that Melville assigned a certain blackness even to the character of Ruth, since Nehemiah calls her his "raven." Since Ruth is totally devoid of any darkness in character or nature, it is much more likely that Melville has Nehemiah call her a raven since she brings him bread. When Elijah is sent by God to warn King Ahab, He has the ravens bring bread to Elijah when he is in the desert (I Kings 17: 4-6). Richard Chase, Herman Melville: A Critical Study (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1949), p. 256.

may be able to escape from the desolate land Agar hates. Clarel is treated with coldness by the Rabbi and the Jewish friends of the family, but in the almost constant absence of Nathan, Agar is able to make her home hospitable to Clarel.

During the course of his days' rambles Clarel has a first introduction to Vine and Rolfe, persons with whom he will become closely acquainted during the pilgrimage to Mar Saba and Bethlehem. But the most significant encounter is with the Italian hunchback, Celio. The two young men pass on a street and between them a sense of recognition is exchanged. "The stranger . . . instant knew--/ At least so might his start declare--/ A brother that he well might own/ In tie of spirit" (I, 1, xi, 44). Although no words pass between them, more is interchanged than "In many a worded interview" (*Ibid.*). A few days later they meet again. Celio awaits Clarel's overture, and Clarel, by awaiting Celio's initiation of the encounter, offends the proud hunchback and he hurries away. Through a mutual shyness and hesitation, they part without speaking. That night a dream comes to Clarel and he wonders "What speck is that so far away/ That wanes and wanes in waxing day? Is it the sail ye fain had spoken/ Last night when surges parted ye?" (I, 1, xv, 62). While standing on the roof of his inn one evening, Clarel hears a piercing cry from across the city, and he has a premonition that it is the death cry

of Celio. He is right. In this abortive encounter with a kindred soul is symbolized the truth that Clarel will learn by the end of the poem:

Blue lights sent up by ship forlorn  
Are answered oft but by the glare  
Of rockets from another, torn  
In the same gale's inclusive snare.  
(I, 1, xiii, 51)

Celio and Clarel can recognize and respond to one another's distress signals but they cannot save one another. As Clarel will learn, he is not the first soul tried by doubt and all that any man can do in life is "Go live it out" (I, 2, xxvii, 287).

Clarel has premonitions that even love for Ruth is not enough. Because he is so important to her and her mother, "Clarel, when in her presence, strove/ The unrest to hide which still could blend/ With all the endearings of their love" (I, 1, xxxix, 153). Ruth is aware of "the curb" in Clarel's affections, but she believes that her love will be sufficient to overcome his hesitation. When some of his companions at Abdon's inn invite Clarel to join the pilgrimage to Siddim and the Dead Sea, he is torn by indecisiveness--both because he hesitates to leave Ruth and because he doesn't really believe John's wilderness will alter his doubt. The fact that Vine and Rolfe will make the trip, too, intrigues him more but still leaves him undetermined. He remains undecided until word is received that Nathan has been killed and his shack burned by

Arabs. When Clarel goes to Ruth and Agar to comfort them, he is turned away from the door. Since he is not a Hebrew, the Rabbi will not let him see the women until the mourning period has passed.

To gain relief from "dull inaction's pain," Clarel decides to accompany the pilgrimage, although he does so with grave misgivings. Yet he cannot force his way into Ruth's home; too, the pilgrimage will return before the mourning period is over. Clarel sends a letter and consigns "a ring/ For pledge of love and Ruth's remembering" (I, 1, xlii, 164). Then the day before the pilgrimage is to begin, Clarel passes an Armenian funeral procession in the street.<sup>34</sup> Since it is a young woman who is to be buried, Clarel immediately is overcome with new doubts that he should leave Ruth.

But yet again he thought it o'er.  
And self-rebukeful, and with mock;  
Thou superstitious doubter--own,  
Biers need be borne; why such a shock

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<sup>34</sup>In his journal of his trip to the Holy Land, Melville wrote of an Armenian funeral he witnessed in Constantinople. "Nearby, saw a woman over a new grave--no grass on it yet. Such abandonment of misery! Called to the dead, put her head down as close to it as possible; as if calling down a hatchway or cellar; besought--'Why dont you speak to me? My God!--It is I!--Ah, speak--but one word!'"--All deaf.--So much for consolation.--This woman & her cries haunt me horribly." In this same reference, Melville talks about seeing an Armenian funeral bier winding through the streets. Journal of a Visit to Europe and the Levant, ed. Howard Horsford (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 89. As the thought of death haunted Melville, it also haunts Clarel and the other pilgrims. (See discussion of the fear of death under Vine.)

When passes this Armenian one?  
 The word's dispatched, and wouldst recall?  
 'Tis but for fleeting interval.  
 (I, 1, xliii, 166)

Because Clarel knows how much Nehemiah longs to go on the pilgrimage, Clarel pays the expenses for him to make the trip, too. Many times Nehemiah has watched with tears in his eyes the "variegated annual train" start out without him, yet he knows that some day he will see the green banks of the Jordan. He also believes that he will not die until he has kneeled on the banks of the river where Christ was baptized.

Which trust proved true,  
 'Twas charity gave faith her due:  
 Without publicity or din  
 It was the student moved herein.  
 (I, 2, i, 177)

Between Clarel and Vine, who takes a particular liking to the saintly man, they look after Nehemiah, who goes to sleep in odd places, and from under whose arm tracts and leaflets slip as he rides absent-mindedly along on a small pearl-gray ass.

In the beginning stages of the trip, Clarel tries to make acquaintance with the banker's future son-in-law, Glaucon, who is about his age. Since Glaucon comes from Smyrna, Clarel tries to converse with him about Homer, a fellow Symrnian. "Yes, I remember . . ." replies Glaucon, "fig-dealer he,/ The veriest old nobody" (I, 2, v, 192). Additional conversational attempts prove equally unrewarding to Clarel, for all Glaucon wishes to do is talk about

"roguish ladies" and hunting, and to sing songs. At first "wishful from every one to learn," Clarel soon realizes that some of the travellers have nothing to teach him. He soon gravitates toward Derwent, Vine and Rolfe. Rolfe provides an intellectual challenge to him, for the man both intrigues and repels him by his pronouncements.

Rolfe is a paradox; on some occasions he is ruthless in honesty and on others he is rather facile in dishonesty.<sup>35</sup> He acts as a devil's advocate on any subject at one moment, and then at another, he is mouthpiece of Pollyanna. Rolfe is well versed in both life and books, with a preference for knowledge gained from life: "Pupils we be of wave and waste--/ Not books" (I, 2, xxxii, 306). With Clarel, Rolfe is particularly ambivalent, sometimes delivering rapier-like thrusts through the youth's earnest inquiries and on other occasions, defending vehemently his most prosaic pronouncements. The youth wonders:

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<sup>35</sup>Rolfe's fear of hurting the feelings of his comrades occasionally causes him to be less than honest with them--a form of dissembling without the accompanying guilt for outright lying which coincides consistently enough in Christian practice that one suspects practitioners consider this evasion of the truth virtuous. Whether this dispensation would come under humility, self-abnegation, or the form of greater honesty--where truth is the desire not to offend--it is difficult to determine. Yet as concerned as Melville was with Truth in the abstract, one suspects that he would be aware of its absence in the concrete instance. Clarel, although kind and thoughtful, is not guilty of Rolfe's concerted attempts to be victor in a pilgrimage popularity contest.



How reconcile Rolfe's wizard chord  
 And forks of esoteric fire,  
 With commonplace of laxer mien?  
 May truth be such a spendthrift lord?  
 (I, 2, xxxii, 308)

Although Clarel believes Rolfe to be not of that "parlour strain/ Which counts each thought that borders pain/ A social treason" (I, 2, xxi, 256), he does see him constantly checking himself in an effort not to give pain. His hyper-sensitivity, as Clarel's, in this instance is similar to that of Melville's. Rolfe is introduced in the poem as one "indiscreet in honesty." That Melville disapproved of an overly frank honesty is apparent from a portrayal he drew of Goneril in The Confidence-Man. He wrote, "Goneril held it flattery to hint praise even of the absent, and even if merited, but honesty to fling people's imputed faults into their faces" (The Confidence-Man, p. 66). In Melville's review of The California and Oregon Trail he criticized Parkman's portrayal of the Indians (see Chapter III, pp. 81-82). Upon later hearing that Parkman resented this criticism, Melville wrote his friend, Evert Duyckinck, "I shall never do it again." Hereafter I shall no more stab at a book (in print, I mean) than I would stab at a man."<sup>36</sup> Melville, in fact, was so susceptible to recognition of any pain that he might cause another that he undoubtedly suffered more anguish by proxy

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<sup>36</sup>Davis and Gilman, Letters, p. 96.

than the persons to whom he thought he brought suffering. A case in point would be when Melville inscribed a London Edition of The Whale to his brother-in-law. He signed the book to John Hoadley "from his friend Herman Melville." Then it must have occurred to Melville that he should have written "brother." He placed an asterisk beside the word "friend" and appended the message "If my good brother John take exception to the use of the word friend here, thinking there is a nearer word; I beg him to remember that saying in the Good Book, which hints there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."<sup>37</sup> Yet even this was not enough to satisfy Melville's conscience. A few days later he made another present of books to Hoadley with the additional apology, "Presented in earnest token of my disclaimer to the criticism of the word 'friend' used on the fly-leaf of the 'Whale.'"<sup>38</sup>

Because Rolfe's experience approximates that of Melville as a sailor, because he has the wide intellectual interests of his creator, and because he has considerable charm, several critics believe Rolfe is an "idealized self-portrait." How anyone could interpret Rolfe as an idealized portrait that Melville drew of himself is a great mystery. Rolfe is not at all the kind of man Melville admired.

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<sup>37</sup>Leyda, Log, p. 483.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 484.

Bezanson, much more legitimately, believes that

Rolfe's speculative and vigorous mind is such a one as the young Melville had displayed in his early New York days at Duyckinck's Saturday-night parties--the kind of mind out of which came Mardi.<sup>39</sup>

This is a most acceptable interpretation, as is Bezanson's statement that Rolfe's "doubts and his beliefs . . . are on his tongue but not deep enough within his heart to rule his actual existence."<sup>40</sup> It is this aspect of Rolfe that makes him almost a hypocritical character. He mouths the belief that the heart should be given preference over the head, and he says that "Vital affections do not draw/ Precepts from Reason's arid law (II, 4, vii, 185), and he busies himself in courtesies to fellow pilgrims as a bon-vivant and a peace-maker, yet there is something lacking in him. He is sterling, but he is also hollow. "His hollow," Clarel believes, is his "manysidedness" (II, 3, xvi, 85). Rolfe is not superficial as Derwent is, and he is not deep as the monomaniacs are. "As Rolfe represents Melville's breadth," Sedgwick says, Mortmain and Ungar "represent his depth."<sup>41</sup> A man without depth, Melville knew, could never be heroic for he would never have the opportunity to discover that which "an heroic man should learn" (Pierre, p. 199).

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<sup>39</sup>Bezanson, "Herman Melville's Clarel," p. 170.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>41</sup>Sedgwick, Tragedy of Mind, p. 208.

Yet, for his own reasons, Bezanson assigns Rolfe the role of intellectual hero of the poem, and he states that it is Rolfe that Clarel decides is "the man who sees aright." This interpretation has the virtue of supplying proof for Bezanson's thesis that Melville gained revenge on Hawthorne for rejecting him by having Clarel choose Rolfe over Vine, but it has the vice of not applying to the poem as a whole. Even if it were not this writer's contention that Clarel finally realizes that no man can provide him with the answers he seeks, and that each man must resolve how to live by himself, it is most unlikely that it would be Rolfe that Clarel would choose as his mentor. Vine and even Mortmain come closer to leading Clarel to the truth he eventually arrives at.

In the episode that Bezanson refers to as the rejection scene of Clarel by Vine, Clarel and Vine sit together looking down on the river Jordan. Clarel has observed Vine closely during the days of the pilgrimage and he has come to revere the man. He looks longingly at the older man, and he makes a silent plea for "communion true/ And close" with Vine. He implores wordlessly "Give me thyself" (I, 2, xxvii, 287). Vine, who is unusually talkative, comments on the scene before them and its parallel with the New World. Clarel thinks how grand it would be if this easy confidential conversation were taking place after

confidings that should wed  
 Our souls in one:--Ah, call me brother!--  
 So feminine his passionate mood  
 Which, long as hungering unfed,  
 All else rejected or withstood.  
 (I, 2, xxvii, 287)

Unable at last to keep silent, "Some inklings he let fall"  
 (Ibid.). Immediately over Vine's face a shadow falls, and  
 Clarel realizes that he has offended Vine. Yet Vine, with-  
 out moving away at all, looks on Clarel with "soft serious  
 eyes" and then in a reverent, hushed manner he changes the  
 subject, directing Clarel's attention to a niche some dis-  
 tance away where Nehemiah is praying. Clarel senses by  
 intuition what Vine's rebuke meant.

Does Vine's rebukeful dusking say--  
 Why, on this vernal bank to-day,  
 Why bring oblations of thy pain  
 To one who hath his share? here fain  
 Lives none can help ye; that believe.  
 Art thou the first soul tried by doubt?  
 Shalt prove the last? Go, live it out.  
 But for thy fonder dream of love  
 In man toward man--the soul's caress--  
 The negatives of flesh should prove  
 Analogies of non-cordialness  
 In spirit. .

(Ibid.)

Clarel makes other overtures to disparate persons, at least  
 in thought (see below), in seeking some earthly reassurance  
 akin to the security of a spiritual love. The silent re-  
 buke of Vine to Clarel is only symbolic of a truth Melville  
 learned in the course of his life: In the ultimate search,  
 "Lives none can help ye; that believe." Unamuno wrote that  
 "the thirst of eternity is what is called love among men,

and whosoever loves another wishes to eternalize himself in him. Nothing is real that is not eternal."<sup>42</sup> It is just this eternal love that Clarel is searching for in finite life. Long before Melville wrote Clarel he had come to terms with man's inevitable aloneness. Whether "Monody" refers to Hawthorne or some other friend, the poem does represent Melville's feelings about human relationships. Finite man cannot answer spiritual longings, nor can woman either. Estrangement comes in life (distance, death). And neither person need be in the wrong.

Bezanson interprets the above scene between Clarel and Vine as proof that Melville was actually rejected by Hawthorne, but this interpretation seems invalid not only in light of the two men's continued lifelong friendship but in the context of the poem. Clarel is seeking a spiritual union of souls on earth that will ease his restlessness, his longings for internal peace. Vine knows that no human love is sufficient to answer his needs. At the time Clarel makes the overture to Vine, he is really aware of this, too, for he taxes himself for seeking a love that is more enduring than Ruth's. "How findest place within thy heart/ For such solitudes apart/ From Ruth?" (I, 2, xxvii, 288). Clarel doesn't understand what prompts him to behave as he does but he is learning through experience. He is not

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<sup>42</sup>Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life, p. 39.

the first person tried by doubt, but he is responding as persons do when it is the first time for them.

Torn by doubt and self-distrust, Clarel is unable to hold himself to any "steadfast thought." He thinks fleetingly of Ruth who is "involved/ With every mystery unresolved/ In time and fate" (II, 3, xxx, 142). He cannot express in words what is troubling him, but it is Ruth, "and oh, much more than Ruth" (Ibid.).

While the pilgrimage party is staying at Mar Saba, Clarel climbs up the Kedron hill, passes through cloisters and winding vaults and by following through a dim passage to a light comes out "upon the Tree." It is the Palm that Vine, Mortmain and Rolfe confront from across the way. Under the protection of the Palm, an old celibate feeds the Mar Saba doves. Clarel is attracted to the monk because of his peaceful, kindly countenance. He says to him, "Father, . ./ Here, sure, is peace" (II, 3, xxx, 144). But he confesses to the Father that he would miss "woman . . . [and] life domestic" (Ibid.). The Mar Saba monk assures Clarel that woman has done man no good and recites many cases in proof; he believes that man is only whole without woman, "the rib restored."

Clarel reflects on such a life, without women, and wonders again about that love that is deeper. He fears that even in possessing Ruth he would hunger still, "in deeper part/ Unsatisfied" (II, 3, xxx, 146). Seeing Vine across

the way on the ledge, he wonders if there "Can be a bond/  
 . . . as David sings in the strain/ That dirges beauteous  
 Jonathan, Passing the love of woman found" (Ibid.). Clarel  
 stands at the balcony thinking of these matters and as the  
 monk passes in and out of his view, he reflects on his  
 "gracious calm." The cloistered life holds out a strong  
 appeal to the young man in its promise of peacefulness, yet  
 his mind keeps reminding him of the sexual appeal of woman.  
 He doesn't know if he has the strength to live the life of  
 a celibate, and he wonders "does the call elect the hero  
 heart?" (II, 3, xxxi, 147). He thinks about the angels of  
 heaven, Raphael, Michael ("Through all their ranks they are  
 masculine") and he knows, according to Matthew, that there  
 are no marriages in Heaven.

Yet love in heaven itself to spare--  
 Love feminine! Can Eve be riven  
 From sex, and disengaged retain  
 Its charm? Think this--then may ye feign  
 The perfumed rose shall keep its bloom,  
 Cut off from sustenance of loam.  
 But if Eve's charm be not supernal,  
 Enduring not divine transplanting--  
 Love kindled thence, is that eternal?  
 Here, here's the hollow--here the haunting!  
 Ah, love, ah wherefore thus unsure?  
 Linked art thou--locked, with Self impure?  
 (II, 3, xxxi, 148)

Clarel continues the thought that is ravaging him, and then  
 in a despairing, agonized plea he asks, "That other love!--  
 Oh heavy load--/ Is naught then trustworthy but God?"  
 (Ibid.).

On the road from Mar Saba to Bethlehem, Clarel



broods apart on the conflicting appeals of heavenly and earthly love. Occasionally, in an attempt the "inward chafe" to shun, he "a feigned quick interest put on" (II, 4, ii, 165) to matters attracting the attention of the pilgrims. Derwent tries to coax Clarel from his moodiness, but Clarel soon sinks into his revery apart, "in void relapse." Only with a temporary skirmish of firing guns that turns out to be the Arnaut firing adieu does Clarel turn full attention to an object at hand. He studies the scarred face of the Arnaut and he thinks of the adage, "A gun's man's voice--sincerest one" (p. 166). Momentarily, Clarel is attracted to that simple life of the warrior. He is so agonized that any life that appears to him as offering a reprieve from his mental torment appeals to him. The warrior knows nothing of the wisest books, and creeds he can dismiss with a look. And how is he the worse for it, Clarel wonders; the halls of Valhalla will welcome him.

Here the narrative voice enters, the guardian angel of Clarel, who chastises him: "So wilful! but 'tis loss and smart,/ Clarel, in thy dissolving heart/ Will't form anew?" (II, 4, ii, 166). When the party reaches Bethlehem, Clarel is attracted anew to the ascetic life by the example of the young monk, Salvaterra, who acts as guide for the group to the Church of the Star. The monk's devotion is so passionate that he even stirs the hearts of Ungar and

Vine. Vine stands aside with Clarel and confesses to him, "in friendly neighbourhood," that the youth by his fervidness has touched him (II, 4, xv, 218).

Later, as Clarel walks with the other pilgrims on the flat roof of a convent, Derwent mentions the names of Boaz and Ruth. Through Clarel's mind flashes the picture of his Ruth, quickly followed by the thought of the funeral bier he saw before leaving Jerusalem. He is overcome by fear. Upon learning that the party will stay a second night in Bethlehem, he thinks of going back alone to Jerusalem. But he doesn't; "Doubt had unhinged so, that her sway,/ In minor things even, could retard/ The will and purpose" (II, 4, xvi, 224). Clarel asks himself if the reason he stays with the group is because he is frightened. The fear that is implied is fear of Ruth's death, but the implication is also present that he fears the death, or inadequacy, of his love for her.

That evening a young Lyonese shares a cell with Clarel. Clarel attempts to engage the youth in serious conversation about Palestine, but the lad evades his attempts. Continually Clarel persists with his probing inquiries, until the youth asks, "You of the West,/ What devil has your hearts possessed,/ You can't enjoy?" (II, 4, xxvi, 264). To each serious question, the Lyonese replies lightly or with song. Clarel has an inkling there is something suspicious about the lad's attitude about the

Hebrews, but when he questions him, the Lyonese becomes vexed. Finally, he insists that Clarel not scourge him so; "Put up, put up your monkish thong" (II, 4, xxvi, 268). The Lyonese substitutes as conversational fare earthy anecdotes and tales about the coquetry and beauty of Jewish women.

When Clarel awakens in the morning, the Lyonese has already left the cell. In the night Clarel had felt that he had been pulled between two goals, one representing the ascetic life of Salvaterra and the other the prodigal life of the Lyonese. Then

A zephyr fanned;  
It vanished, and he felt the strain  
Of clasping arms which would detain  
His heart from each ascetic range.  
He woke; 'twas day; he was alone.  
(II, 4, xxvi, 269)

Yet Clarel feels some release from the torment he has been in for days; "Vital he knew organic change,/ Or felt, at least, that change was working--/ A subtle innovator lurking" (*Ibid.*). He becomes restless to leave for Jerusalem without delay. But to stay with the party, he has to wait several hours more. To while away the time, he goes down to David's Well and here he is again beset with misgivings. He wonders who will bring to him that "living water which who drinks/ He thirsteth not again!" (II, 4, xxviii, 274). To pacify his anxiousness, he tells himself that a thirst long ungratified will by itself go away. Then he berates

himself for letting hold of any thought that will molest his calm. "Yearnest for peace so? sick of strife?" (II, 4, xxviii, 274). He can't believe himself capable of living shallowly.

how live  
At all, if once fugitive  
From thy own nobler part, though  
          pain  
Be portion inwrought with the grain?  
(Ibid.)

Fluctuating hopes alternate with fears as Clarel, on Shrove Tuesday evening, rides back to Jerusalem with the remaining pilgrims in the party. He tries to talk himself into the idea that what he must do is boldly pick the fruit of the tree of life.

If doubt  
Spin spider-like her tissue out,  
And make a snare in reason dim--  
Why hang a fly in flimsy web?  
(II, 4, xxix, 278)

To rationalize his abdication from his "nobler part," he thinks of Ruth's "mute appeal" that he should not walk the way of her father. Filled with jubilant resolve, Clarel determines that he will rescue Ruth from the arid land and take her home with him. Then just as rapidly, he vacillates. He remembers the words of the Mar Saba almoner, that woman is man's downfall. Back and forth Clarel's mind races until finally he makes the firm resolve "Take thy wife;/ Venture, and prove the soul of life,/ And let fate drive" (II, 4, xxix, 280).

Fate drives before that event. As Clarel and the party arrive at the outskirts of Jerusalem they encounter "two narrow pits" and "twin figures" folded in cloth. Ruth and Agar are dead. They have died of grief, and they are being buried by a band of Jews.

It is the last indignity that Clarel can withstand. He berates faith; "Tis perjured!" he insists. And he pleads for death to take him. The Jews ask that Clarel leave the sacred burial place for he is not one of them, but he will not leave.

Spurn--I'll endure; all spirit's fled  
When one fears nothing.--Bear with me,  
Yet bear!--Conviction is not gone  
Though faith's gone: that which shall not be  
Still ought to be!

(II, 4, xxx, 285)

In the gray dawn of Ash Wednesday Clarel stands witness to the burial of Ruth and her mother.

The deaths of the two women are symbolic of the impermanence of human love. Certain critics consider the deaths as unnecessary melodrama, yet Melville had to compress into a few weeks all experience from which Clarel could learn. When Clarel thrusts aside his conflicting doubts and decides to put his trust in earthly married love, he has to learn that in man's resolve there is no weight that can offset the hand of fate. Clarel had to learn that man is essentially alone. "Alone, for all had left him so" (II, 4, xxxii, 288). Before Vine left, Clarel caught from

him "new sense/ Developed through fate's pertinence" (Ibid.). He now had experienced that which Vine had earlier revealed to him in their telepathic exchange: "Lives none can help ye." Human love died for humans died, or they left one alone to seek their own ways. Eternity could not be purchased through human love; naught was trustworthy but God.

In the week approaching Easter, Clarel is still in Jerusalem. "Illusion of grief's wakeful doom" causes him on Good Friday to visualize a parade of the dead: Celio, Nehemiah, Mortmain, Nathan, Agar, Ruth. Where, Clarel asks, is "He who helpeth us,/ The Comforter" (II, 4, xxxii, 291). On Easter Sunday, the devout celebrate for "Christ is arisen." But for Clarel, he sees no signs that Ruth may "so burst the prison." Seven weeks after Easter, a procession of water-carriers, soldiers, Moslem dames, Jews, strangers and exiles walk along the thoroughfare. They are "cross-bearers."

But, lagging after, who is he  
 Called early every hope to test,  
 And now, at close of rarer quest,  
 Finds so much more the heavier tree?  
 From slopes when even Echo's gone,  
 Wending, he murmurs in low tone:  
 'They wire the world--far under sea  
 They talk; but never comes to me  
 A message from beneath the stone.'  
 (II, 4, xxxiv, 296)

Clarel is alone. He is still young in years but he is mature in thought. His education into a tragic vision

of life has been rapid and complete. No message comes to him from under the stone; is naught then trustworthy?

Naught, for Melville, was trustworthy, except hope. This is his message in the final words of Clarel. The Epilogue in its entirety follows:

If Luther's day expand to Darwin's year,  
Shall that exclude the hope--foreclose the fear?

Unmoved by all the claims our times avow,  
The ancient Sphinx still keeps the porch of shade  
And Comes Despair, whom not her calm may cow,  
And coldly on that adamantine brow  
Scrawls undeterred his bitter pasquinade.  
But Faith (who from the scrawl indignant turns),  
With blood warm oozing from her wounded trust,  
Inscribes even on her shards of broken urns  
The sign o' the cross--the spirit above the dust!

Yea, ape and angel, strife and old debate--  
The harps of heaven and dreary gongs of hell;  
Science the feud can only aggravate--  
No umpire she betwixt the chimes and knell:  
The running battle of the star and clod  
Shall run for ever--if there be no God.

Degrees we know, unknown in days before;  
The light is greater, hence the shadow more;  
And tantalised and apprehensive Man  
Appealing--Wherefore ripen us to pain?  
Seems there the spokesman of dumb Nature's train.  
But through such strange illusions have they  
  passed  
Who in life's pilgrimage have baffled striven--  
Even death may prove unreal at the last,  
And stoics be astounded into heaven.

Then keep thy heart, though yet but ill-  
resigned--  
Clarel, thy heart, the issues there but mind;  
That like the crocus budding through the snow--  
That like a swimmer rising from the deep--  
That like a burning secret which doth go  
Even from the bosom that would hoard and keep;  
Emerge thou mayst from the last whelming sea,  
And prove that death but routs life into victory.  
(II, 4, xxxv, 297-298)

## CONCLUSION



## CONCLUSION

Herman Melville was a man who never sacrificed his courage or his honesty in order to unburden himself from the weight of a tragic vision of life. To the end of his life unable to believe or disbelieve, he continued to question without accepting any answers, and he sustained the very breach within himself. Ideological solutions that satisfied his optimistic brethern could not content him for these solutions could only be derived from a suppression of part of the truth. The truth Melville sought was absolute and whole. The only supports he had to keep him directed in his search were his love of man and a hope--not a belief--that there was a harmonious ordering that as yet remained unrevealed.

In his poem "Herman Melville," W. H. Auden wrote

Towards the end he sailed into an extraordinary  
And anchored in his home at last and reached mildness,  
And rode within the harbor of her hand, his wife  
And went across each morning to an office  
As though his occupation were another island.<sup>43</sup>

This is not the Herman Melville about whom I have written; the Herman Melville I know never anchored in any harbor; he, as Bulkington, forever kept the open independence of his seas. According to Auden, Melville discovered that "Goodness

<sup>43</sup>Auden, "Herman Melville," p. 368.

existed." "That was the new knowledge" that allowed him to drop anchor. This was no new knowledge to Melville; he always knew goodness existed. But he also knew that "Evil and good they braided play/ Into one cord" (II, 4, iv, 174), and that evil was "disproportionate in influence" (Ibid.).

Herman Melville never could, nor would, seek the safety of the shore. "Know ye, now, Bulkington?" Then you also know Melville.

Glimpses do ye seem to see of that mortally intolerable truth; that all deep earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore?

But as in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God--so, better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety! For worm-like, then, oh! who would craven crawl to land! Terrors of the terrible! is all this agony so vain? Take heart, take heart, O Bulkington! Bear thee grimly, demigod! Up from the spray of thy ocean-perishing--straight up, leaps thy apotheosis!

(Moby-Dick, pp. 97-98)

These are the words Melville wrote in 1850: "Take heart, take heart." And in 1876, these are the words he wrote again, "Keep thy heart, Clarel, thy heart." Keep your heart, Leopardi, Obermann, Spinoza, for "death may prove unreal at the last/ And stoics be astounded into heaven." Take heart you meanest thief, for "Emerge thou mayst from the last whelming sea,/ And prove that death but routs life into victory."

Conrad Aiken knew the Herman Melville whom I have written about:

Depth below depth this love of man  
 among unnumbered and unknown  
 to mark and make his cryptic own  
 one landfall of all time began;  
 of all life's hurts to treasure one  
 and hug it to the wounded breast,  
 and this to dedicate the rest,  
 all injuries received or done.  
 Your towers again but towers now blest  
 your haven in a shoreless west  
 O mariner of the human soul  
 who in the landmark notched the Pole  
 and in the Item loved the Whole.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Conrad Aiken, "Herman Melville," Sheepfold Hill  
 (New York: Sagamore Press, 1958), p. 46.

## APPENDIX A

HERMAN MELVILLE

by W. H. Auden

Towards the end he sailed into an extraordinary mildness,  
And anchored in his home at last and reached his wife  
And rode within the harbor of her hand,  
And went across each morning to an office  
As though his occupation were another island.

Goodness existed: that was the new knowledge.  
His terror had to blow itself quite out  
To let him see it; but it was the gale had blown him  
Past the Cape Horn of sensible success  
That cries, "This rock is Eden. Shipwreck here,"  
And like an instinct had said always "No,"  
But deafened him with thunder and confused with lightning.  
--The maniac hero hunting like a jewel  
The rare ambiguous monster that had maimed his sex,  
Hatred for hatred, ending in a scream,  
The unexplained survivor breaking off the nightmare--  
All that was intricate and false. The truth was simple.

Evil is formidable but always human,  
And shares our bed and eats at our own table,  
And we are introduced to Goodness every day,  
Even in drawing-rooms among a crowd of faults;  
He has a name like Billy and is almost perfect  
But wears a stammer like a decoration,  
And every time they meet the same thing has to happen;  
It is the Evil that is helpless like a lover  
And has to pick a quarrel and succeeds,  
And both are openly destroyed before our eyes.

For now he was awake and knew  
No one is ever spared except in dreams.  
But there was something else the nightmare had distorted;  
Even the punishment was human and a form of love,  
And he himself had never been abandoned;  
The howling storm had been his father's presence  
And all the way he had been carried on his father's  
breast.

Who now had set him gently down and left him.  
He stood upon the narrow balcony and listened;  
And all the night above him sang as in his childhood  
"All, all is vanity," but it was not the same,  
For now the words descended like the calm of mountains.  
--Nathaniel had been shy because his love was selfish--  
And now he cried in exultation and surrender  
"The Godhead is broken like bread, We are the pieces."

And sat down at his desk and wrote a story.

## APPENDIX B

### PLOT SUMMARY OF CLAREL

"Ostensibly Clarel is a revised guide book with a slight romantic story added on. The hero, a young American, formerly a student of divinity, goes on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In Jerusalem he falls in love with a maiden, Ruth, whose American father adopted both the religion and the land of the Jews. Ruth's father is killed on his farm by marauding Arabs. Clarel would comfort her, but by the rites of her religion she is forbidden during her mourning to converse with strangers.

"Clarel joins a company of pilgrims and tourists and continues his travels. They ride slowly through the mountainous and desert country, stopping at all places of Biblical renown and eventually return to Jerusalem by way of Bethlehem. In Jerusalem Clarel finds that Ruth has died in his absence. All alone now, Clarel must bear his sorrow as best he can. The last we see of him, he is in the vast motley of people who crowd along the Via Crucis at the heart of the Holy City. So ends the story, which is no more than a straw to show the deeper drift of Melville's thought in the voluminous work."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Taken from Sedgwick, Tragedy of Mind, pp. 203-204.



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